

GEORG PEMLER

The flight to the Don

This book is an account of his experiences during the Second World War. Memoirs of a former Luftwaffe reconnaissance pilot based on rescued documents, which are so captivating and realistic that it is hard to believe that they were written down many years after the event.

The author, deployed as an aerial observer and reconnaissance pilot on the southern and central sections of the Eastern Front and repeatedly entrusted with special tasks, describes flights over the Dnieper region, the Voronezh Front and the Kursk-Belgorod Front. Reconnaissance flights that provided the middle and higher command with important information about the enemy's situation and contributed significantly to relieving the fighting troops of the army and the Waffen-SS. The close interaction between the crew of a reconnaissance aircraft and the ground personnel is described so closely that the reader has the impression of being in their midst.

The dramatic events in Romania, the battle of the "Legion of St. Michael the Archangel" to the bitter end, form the basis for the depiction of the military situation as it really was at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Numerous pictures, the precise breakdown of the balance of forces at the focal points of the action in conjunction with situation maps, provide the reader with an overview of the military operations of the time and make the book a document of rare vividness.

The book will bring back memories not only for airmen, but also for former soldiers and infantrymen who had to bear the brunt of the battle. It is further proof of the great bond of comradeship that surrounded all former soldiers of the Wehrmacht and which survived defeat.

DRUFFEL-PUBLISHER

1)-81 37 Leoni on Lake Starnberg

Georg Pemler
THE FLIGHT TO THE DON
From the secret war diary
of a reconnaissance pilot

Dedicated to
to my brave wife,
to all my comrades in aerial reconnaissance,
especially my crews in many enemy flights.

Heinz Holzhey
Werner Godhusen
Franz Hofbauer

To the living
in unbroken loyalty and comradeship,
the dead
in honorable memory.

GEORG PEMLER

THE FLIGHT TO THE DON

the secret war diary of a reconnaissance pilot

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LEONI AT LAKE STARNBERG
Cover design: H. O. Pollähne, Brunswick

Picture credits: Federal Archives, Junkers Archive MBB, Library for
Contemporary
history, Stuttgart, Dornier factory photo, Messerschmitt archive MBB,
German Museum Special Collection, private archive of the author

International standard book number
3 8061 1011 5

1981
© Druffel-Verlag
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Typesetting and printing: Gugath & Sohn, Munich
Binding work: Thomas-Buchbinderei, Augsburg

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FOREWORD

When commanders write down their memories, regiments and battalions become pieces in a huge chess game.

When the lieutenant picks up his pen, flashes of lightning flash across the scene, the pale faces of his dead soldiers come back to life, his crew prepares for hostilities, his company takes to the field as if it were only yesterday. The dead and the living stand before him in rank and file, ready once again to give their last as he commands.

The lieutenant will not be asked about victory or defeat. The face of a mother or a child will appear before him, and they will ask him "Where is my son? Where is my father?"

The success of a battle may decide when he wears the stars of a captain, but the death of his men will claim his conscience until the hour strikes him too. Conrad v. Hötzenndorf always began his lessons as a tactics teacher with the words:

"War is waged by people. Anyone who wants to understand war must therefore first and foremost know people and their reactions to physical and psychological influences."

Leadership in such times can therefore only mean Obedience to oneself and to the livelihoods of one's own people. Obedience to the tasks we have freely chosen, obedience to the command of our conscience. Only from this unconditional obedience can the claim to power over others, the claim to command, arise.

The assistant leader then becomes a servant if he has nothing to counter the order other than the monotonous: "Yes, my Führer! Yes, General!" Only the courage born of unconditional obedience to his own commitment, to responsibility towards the last of his men, makes him a leader. Only those who are prepared to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their deep conviction can demand sacrifices from others, can give orders.

Because we are and remain human beings - both as leaders of an army and as commanders of any kind of weapon system - I believe that, despite all the pragmatism of everyday military life, we must not forget to cultivate what I consider to be the basis of military life in general: comradeship.

That is why I believe that the real hero of the battle is not the reckless daredevil, but the one who, in the roar of the fury of war, does not forget

that a warm heart beats in the breast of his men, that God has also given them a soul, and who acts accordingly.

He who goes to battle only for the laurels of victory can easily be crowned with the thorns of defeat. But he who fights for the sake of his neighbor will rise again in the memory of his brothers.

Millions have fallen, but one rises eternally:

MY CAMERAD.

I am building this memorial for this one, so that he will remain immortal, even if we ourselves have long since withered away. When I have joined stone to stone, his form is formed from hard marble, then his soul will also find eternal life.

Many will ask themselves, what can the lieutenant contribute to shaping the picture of history? Not much, certainly. But the little that is, brightly illuminated by highlights, is his skill, his adventure, his life and thus part of history.

We did not obey because we cowardly bowed to the power of the giant, but because our own experience was part of the whole. We knew that our own fatherland must also have a fair share of the gifts of this world. We were not blind, we did not wear the blinkers of a stubborn young horse. We walked through life with open eyes. Much of what is proclaimed as "history" today has little to do with history. What I experienced myself, bent over the space glasses in the photo van, at the equalization device in the photo station, as a reconnaissance pilot on many fronts, that is living history.

No, I feel no shame. That's why I can't surrender to the loathing of ourselves that seems to determine German destiny today.

We, still boys, felt the shame of the Versailles peace with our fathers and were therefore prepared to make the sacrifice of war.

This knowledge of the essence of all things has prevented me from agreeing with the condemnatory curses to this day. Even back then, when I was released from the military hospital in 1945, half blind, almost deaf and barely able to walk. That's why August 23, 44, which threatened to become my family's fate, was the day of a new beginning. No curses came from my lips when, after years, I was able to embrace my wife and son again on their return from long captivity. We were happy, unspeakably happy. There was no more room for cursing and hatred towards those who were supposedly to blame for our fate. It was a fate that thousands, even

millions of German people had to experience at the time and therefore nothing special.

What shocked me most in 1945 was not the lost war; it was the ingratiating alacrity with which political and military leaders who had just been presented to us as role models threw themselves into the excrement of the moral degradation of the entire nation. We came back and found hatred where we thought we had found love.

When I am often asked what my best experiences were after the war, I can only say it was the reunion with old comrades. It was the joy and pride of being able to look each other in the eye without shame and not so much the thousandfold "Do you remember?"

It is happiness to be among so many people with whom you have walked through the most difficult hours of life; and that there is no one who can say: "You don't belong to us!"

So today I would like to thank all those who have stood by my side as loyal comrades during these years. It also goes to those superiors who were able to fulfill the second sentence of Article 4 of the "Duties of the German Soldier": "Soldierly leadership is based on a sense of responsibility, superior skill and tireless care."

Deep in my heart, however, I carry the thanks that one of our great Germans wrote down in such wonderful words:

"What I am and what I have, I thank you, my fatherland!"

Georg Pemler

ABOUT THIS BOOK

When a television crew from one of the Warsaw Pact states visited me in the summer of 1969 and found me "worthy" of a lengthy interview - albeit under false pretenses - one of the reporters suddenly asked me: "As far as we know, you are one of the soldiers who took part in Hitler's invasion of the USSR and even helped to prepare it."

Surprised, I pointed out that to measure my work at that time by such standards would be to considerably overestimate the service of a sergeant and officer candidate.

From that moment on, I knew that the reporter was aware of assignments that I believed to be among the best kept secrets of the war.

There was no longer any point in remaining silent.

I answered him something like this:

"My lord, I am completely deaf to the word 'raid'. In German, 'Überfall' means to attack an enemy by surprise, unprepared and underhand. This certainly does not apply to the German Wehrmacht's attack on the Red Army.

It may be that today Hitler's 'invasion' is assumed to be a historical fact. For me, however, only what I have seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears and what has been proven by accurate historiography counts. I was still young at the time, but I was perfectly capable of forming my own opinion.

The developments at that time allow only two conclusions to be drawn: Either the leadership of the Red Army had known for a long time that the German Wehrmacht was determined to attack, or it intended to attack the German Reich itself. I knew then, and many people know now, that the leadership of the Red Army received such excellent intelligence from countless traitors that it could not have been surprised by any action taken by the Wehrmacht. To imply otherwise would mean taking the generals of the Red Army for fools, and at least I never did.

Certainly Hitler, as Führer and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, bore full responsibility; the demand for a pre-emptive attack did not originate in Hitler's brain, but in the brains of the German General Staff, which in turn had relied on the intelligence provided by Admiral Canaris.

Only the increasingly threatening rise of the Soviet force potential on our eastern border had induced the General Staff to obtain Hitler's approval for preventive measures."

From that day on, I was determined to contribute a small piece of history from my own experience and knowledge.

"It's only the good appearance they're waiting
for to let loose on this poor country
the wild hordes of their war power.
In it with the victor's rights and to destroy the
old letters of freedom under the appearance of
just chastisement."

Friedrich Schiller, "Wilhelm Teil"

SECTION 1

Romanian odyssey

Names blow away like smoke and mirrors.
Some of them were chosen or changed arbitrarily.
Some people will recognize themselves and others
and remember the events of that time.

The dark, rain-saturated clouds hung low on the wooded slopes of the Jeschken. Rain showers lashed against the windshields and obscured our view for seconds. A reflective film of rain covered the wing covering. The old He 46 bucked and shook like a stubborn cavalry horse. We kept close to the slope to get into the most favorable approach direction to the airfield. After a few minutes we were hovering over the first houses of Reichenberg. There were a few vehicles on the streets, here and there a hooded figure. I slowly eased off the throttle and pushed the "nose" under the landing cross. There was hardly any activity on the small airfield. The near dusk cast its shadows over the bare fields. We hovered in slowly, passing a few small houses, then a few more trees, a light push on the rudder and we were back on the ground. Throttle out, stick to the belly and into the brakes, the plane skidded over the wet grass. A small turn and we rolled to one of the small wooden sheds.

The noise of the engine rang in my ears. A slight piercing pain made itself felt. I tried to press air into my ears through my nose, but the pressure didn't release. I have rarely been as tired and exhausted after a flight as I was this time. I was glad to have the ground under my feet again. I was freezing miserably in my thin summer suit. It was still a bit too early for this light clothing. In an open airplane - the cold airflow above, the warmth of the engine below - you need a robust nature at this time of year.

I reported to flight control, unstrapped my parachute, said goodbye to the observer and headed over to my barracks. A quick hot shower and into bed. There was no point in going to the doctor at that hour, and I could use the treatment methods of the "medics" myself.

After a few breaths, the dream world of a deep sleep enveloped me. Images of the past, childhood experiences and a colorful, shadowy present flashed by. A world that is the other side of our lives, an inseparable part of our soul. When sleep releases the switching processes from the logic of conscious thought into the subconsciousness of dreams, that peace returns which should be sacred to man; there he awakens from the depths of his soul to his real self.

"Sergeant, please stand up!"

Again and again this call, this voice penetrated me and, like the fisherman's net, tried to dive into the stream of my dreams and capture my thoughts for the present. I was tired, unspeakably tired. Only slowly did I gain control over my senses and tried to recognize the uninvited caller whose face lay in the shadow of the dim ceiling lamp. At last I was fully awake. The sergeant on duty was standing in front of me, holding me by the shoulders and trying to shake the sleep from my body.

"What's this business," I told him angrily, "it's still deep night outside!"

A glance at the clock and I thought I was dreaming, it was 11.15 pm. All at once, I realized the leaden tiredness that was still lingering in all my limbs. I had only slept for a few hours.

"You, take your jokes to someone else," I raged angrily.

"It's no joke, sergeant, you should report to the head of the student company immediately!"

"You can't be serious," I replied, "the boss is asleep at this time of night, what should he want from me?"

Then I was fully awake.

"Tell the boss that I'm coming immediately!"

The UvD clicked his heels briefly and left my room.

Drowsy, I groped my way to the locker, into my uniform, boots on, gloves, cap, belt. We were ready to go. Silence reigned in the barracks. The corridor was poorly lit. The lamps in the barracks yard swung back and forth in a milky haze. In their dim light, you could barely make out the outlines of the barracks.

One of the windows in the company barracks was actually brightly lit. Not a joke after all. A bright strip of light under the door of the chief's room. I knocked. The somewhat gruff "Come in!" from the officer I hardly knew sounded loudly.

"Report to the post as ordered, Major!"

"Take a seat!"

Obviously having just slipped out of bed himself, he didn't give me a second glance.

"I have to inform you of an urgent telex from the Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force. You have been ordered to a special assignment with immediate effect. Further details are not included. Get ready to march immediately. The KvD will take you to the station. At midnight a train will leave for Prague, where you will have a connection to Vienna. You will report to the Vienna Air District Command in the morning. You will

receive further instructions there. Here are your marching orders, the military ticket and a sealed envelope with a copy of the telex. Break a leg!"

Before I knew it, I was standing in the semi-darkness of the hallway again. I struggled with a choking feeling in my throat. Once again, my desire to finally complete my flying training seemed to melt into nothingness. Completely confused, I walked to my accommodation.

I hurriedly packed my suitcase and clothes bag. There wasn't too much left in the second year of the war. As soon as I was ready to march, the driver reported for duty. My comrades from the neighboring rooms woke up and stuck their heads out.

"What are you up to? Has something happened to your relatives?"

"No, everything is fine. Unfortunately, I have a new command. Take care! Break a leg!"

Let the comrades have their own thoughts; I certainly didn't feel like having long conversations. The car rolled through the darkened streets of Reichenberg. Nobody would have thought of war in this charming little town if it hadn't been for this ghostly hustle and bustle. At the station, I still had a few minutes for a snack. The train only had a short stop. I stowed my luggage in a compartment with few people; the other passengers, an officer and a civilian, were not exactly pleased about my intrusion, they had gone to rest.

Together with the two gentlemen, I changed trains in Prague. When it turned out that our common destination was Vienna, we looked for a seat together. We found a free compartment where we could stretch out again. As the first signs of the approaching day appeared to the east, I tried to form a picture of the area the train was passing through from the shadows scurrying past. I sensed that I had already been here. On a station building that the train slowly passed through, I read "Gmünd". We were on old Austrian soil.

A few weeks after the Sudetenland was ceded to the German Reich, I had to accompany one of the officers of the staff, Major Kleinschmidt, to survey work along the new border. It was inconceivable to me at the time that there could be war. I found him to be an excellent teacher. Not only did he have the experience of a long life as an aviator - he was one of the first to fly over the Alps in an airplane before the First World War - he also had the universal education of the "Wiener Neustädter Akademiker", as the students of the Austrian military academy were often called.

Only rarely in my later life did I experience officers with a similar level

of education. The few months I was allowed to work with him and for him were some of the most fruitful of my youth. What neither my parents nor my teachers had been able to do: he awakened in me a thirst for knowledge that would stay with me for the rest of my life.

He taught me to get to the bottom of things and opened my eyes to the wonderful connections in history. With his help, I overcame the first great disappointments of my life as a soldier. Until then, I had been burning with impatience, unable to find my way out of my dreams and into the harsh reality, daring to face all the dangers, but through him I became more thoughtful. From what I had learned and the sum of my ideals, I drew the firm outlines of a picture of the present that was an astonishingly accurate reflection of reality. Suddenly I sensed that we were on the brink of a new war. What I did not know was that this battle had long since broken out.

Shortly after Stockerau, the train crossed the Danube. My disappointment turned into joyful anticipation. There were more and more familiar places that brought back memories of happy days. Korneuburg was already bathed in sunlight. In Döbling we reached the outskirts of Vienna. The Franz-Josefs-Bahnhof was overflowing with the colorful hustle and bustle of the early day. The morning rush hour poured a stream of countless people into the city. I put my luggage in storage and took the next streetcar to the city center.

I felt at home in Vienna. Everything here was familiar to me, the sparkling diversity of the people as well as the houses that radiated an old-fashioned sense of security. It was strange that this melting pot of the monarchy had not lost its ability, even in the confines of the republic, not only to welcome strangers, but literally to absorb them and make them into its own kind. However, anyone who was not prepared to be completely absorbed in this city could quickly - and then forever - be cast out.

I vividly remember a late summer's day in 1938. Together with some of my comrades, I had gone to a small pub in the bright morning to celebrate the successful completion of an exam. We all didn't have much money and had to be very economical with our wages. Suddenly, the waiter served us a round of "slivovitz", followed by a second. Of course we wanted to thank the as yet unknown donor. The waiter discreetly pointed to a middle-aged gentleman sitting at the next table.

The comrades decided that I should express our thanks. Without much ado, I stood up, walked over, stood up straight in military style and thanked

them on behalf of my comrades for the kind gesture and the invitation.

A beaming laugh crossed the man's face, he rose to his full height - and he really was a giant - spread his arms and shouted across the entire restaurant:

"All German comrades are my guests. Come and sit with me. Eat and drink what you like."

It was clear from his pronunciation that he was not German, so at first we were at a loss as to what to do, but then we went over.

He was standing "Be careful", as the Austrians say, and reported a long military title from the Imperial and Royal Army. Army, from which we could only gather that he must have been something like a sergeant, was Croatian and came from the area around Agram.

Apart from the fact that this invitation almost led to my first "drunken stupor", the next few hours were an experience not only for me. He proudly handed us pictures of himself as a soldier, clad in all his decorations - and there were quite a few - and told us about the battles and skirmishes in which he had taken part. He even had his military ID with him, neatly stored in a leather case like a treasure. I often noticed that the peoples of the south-east and east handled documents much more carefully and respectfully than we did in Germany. What impressed me deeply, however, was his unwavering respect for Emperor Franz Joseph and the great hopes that he, as a Croat, placed in Adolf Hitler. You could feel the sincere conviction in his words. Not only we, but all the other guests were carried away by his enthusiasm. When he talked about Hitler's entry into Vienna and the parade, which he had witnessed by chance in the spring, tears ran down his cheeks. As the innkeeper told us later, the man was often his guest. He had made it from a simple farmer's boy to one of the richest Croatian cattle traders. For him, our bill was nothing more than a tip.

Somehow this man laid the foundation for the silent affection I have for all Balkan peoples, whether Croats or Bulgarians, Romanians or Greeks.

Vienna, not only the capital, but also the bearer of the ethnic diversity of a universal empire, a meeting place for its diverse people, that was what fascinated me so much.

I got out at Opernring and walked the few steps. The gatekeeper of the Luftgaukommando gave me a visitor's slip and a private accompanied me. After an endless up and down countless stairs and corridors, I finally stood in front of the door of the officer I had to report to: Captain Czech.

A beeping voice answered my knock with a timid "Come in". A pale,

blonde woman asked what I wanted. I gave her my name and rank and handed her the envelope with the telex. As soon as she entered her boss's room, I heard a strong voice:

"Come in, sergeant, I'm waiting for you!"

I was standing in front of a pleasant officer in his forties, who looked at me intently.

"So there you are. You're no stranger to this house."

"That would surprise me, Captain. It's been two years since I worked on the staff of the Air Force Command."

As he turned to the armored cabinet, he casually mentioned:

"You once worked for Colonel Brunner, didn't you?"

"Yes, Herr Hauptmann, Staff KoLuft Army Group B, late fall 1939, but I also know Herr Oberst as deputy commander of Reconnaissance Group 14."

"That's right," he said and turned to me somewhat abruptly. "Why aren't you an officer yet? Have you done something wrong?"

I was embarrassed by the question. He sensed my embarrassment.

"You don't need to answer. We are fully informed. Don't hang your head, things will be fine," he said kindly, "I just wanted you to explain things to me once."

Captain Czech had taken a sealed envelope out of the cupboard with my name written on it in large letters.

"We don't have much time, so I'll keep things short. You're leaving for Bucharest this morning. Here is your passport with visa, in this envelope papers for the office you have to report to in Bucharest. You are accompanying a gentleman who will be arriving in a few minutes. Do you have any civilian matters with you?"

"Yes, sir, captain. A light-colored suit and a gabardine coat."

"That's enough for now. Go to the station immediately and get your luggage. Leave the uniform items in the clothing room. Use the company car parked in the courtyard. Please don't interrupt your journey, it's urgent."

I was back barely thirty minutes later. I quickly changed in an adjoining room. I handed in my uniform and was ready to go.

As soon as I had reported back to Captain Czech, an unobtrusive but very smartly dressed gentleman entered the room. I was introduced.

As he shook my hand, his eyes slid over me scrutinizingly.

"So you're my traveling companion. I hope we can make it to Bucharest together. Dr. Barth," he introduced himself. If my usually keen ear for dialects didn't let me down completely, I certainly didn't have a Viennese in

front of me. I guessed the area around Linz. There was no doubt that he was an officer. An athletic appearance that immediately captivated me.

"Very briefly, the most important rules of conduct. Your military papers disappear. Only show your passport at controls. From now on we are employees of the 'Economic Research Society, Bucharest Branch Office'. You will always comply with me. Everything else is my business. Do you understand?"

"Yes, doctor!"

Despite the friendly tone, there was something in that voice that brooked no argument. I sensed this immediately. Two soldiers collected our luggage. Hptm. Czech gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder to say goodbye, exchanged a few more trivial words with Dr. Barth and walked us to the door.

"But now it's urgent, do you still want to catch the Bucharest train," he called after us.

Our driver seemed to take this literally. He drove off as if he were the driver of Vienna's professional fire department. It was just lucky that the streets of Vienna had become empty in those first days of April 1941.

Where had the exciting jumble of cars and carriages from the spring of 1939 gone? I quickly tried to catch a glimpse here and there of familiar places. It was a pity that I had to say goodbye so soon to this city that had played such a decisive role in shaping my youth. With whistling tires, the car turned from Kärntner Ring to Schwarzenbergplatz, passing the palace of Prince Schwarzenberg, the building that so impressively dominated the architecture of this square.

A few hundred meters away, in a building of the former Austrian army, I was on duty in the winter of 1938/39. Together with a few comrades, I had the task of recording important documents of Austrian army history on 35mm film. It was a job that I was initially reluctant to do, but then turned into a feverish interest. I relived part of the history that led to the outbreak of the First World War. File notes by Serbian officers and diplomats on the preparations for the Sarajevo assassination, references to the training of "students" in Russia and by Russian officers. Precise time studies and location sketches for the assassins, attaché reports from St. Petersburg. I had documents in front of me that few people had ever had access to. Everything I had learned about history up to that point emerged from the foggy picture of an unknown past and took on the sharp contours of a present I had witnessed.

Our driver turned off at the southern end of the square onto Prinz-Eugen-Straße. Another look at Belvedere Palace, the wonderful park where I had spent many an hour. At Wiedner Gürtel we had already reached our destination, the Südbahnhof. The driver waved to a porter. Dr. Barth and I hurried through the station. From the babble of voices of the travelers, Southeast Europe revealed itself in all its ethnic diversity: Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, even Turkish resounded through the hall. A diversity that had so much in common despite the confusion of languages. On the far left, on the first platform, stood our train, whose staff were preparing for departure. Far ahead, almost at the front of the train, was the German Wehrmacht courier car.

As soon as we had taken the seats reserved for us and stowed our luggage in the net, the train started moving. Apart from us, there was a short, stocky gentleman in civilian clothes in the compartment, who I was sure was Viennese from the few words of greeting.

Disappointed that my stay in this city that I had grown so fond of was far too short, I looked out at the houses on the outskirts that were rushing past faster and faster. I looked longingly over to the small Schwechat gardens, from which the first splashes of color of the approaching spring could be seen. It had been almost two years since I had to unexpectedly break off my pilot training due to my limited suitability for military flying. Where might the comrades who had been at A/B school with me have gone?

Dr. Barth had turned his attention to reading a file, although he looked at me thoughtfully from time to time. He obviously sensed that I wanted to be alone with my thoughts. Our traveling companion remained silent. After Bruck an der Leitha came the German customs control and a patrol of the field police. Dr. Barth and the gentleman in civilian clothes were obviously no strangers here, and after a quick glance at our passports and a respectful gesture of honor, we were left alone. After a while, the doctor spoke to me.

"You don't seem quite happy with your new job? Or do you have such fond memories of Vienna?"

"Both are correct, Doctor. I went to Grossenhain with such high hopes. Now everything has changed again. I am an aviator with heart and soul. I'm still young and really want to experience the adventures of my dreams."

Dr. Barth smiled at me sympathetically:

"Young friend, if these are the only disappointments in your life, then you can count yourself lucky. Despite your youth and despite a military career that has not gone smoothly, you have achieved remarkable things.

You have won the recognition of a number of gentlemen whom I call my friends. The only reason we have chosen you for future assignments is because you have been recommended to us as a reliable man. A wild, thoughtless daredevil is of no use to us. Why don't you let things run their course? Who knows what good all this will do. When this war is over, the world will have changed one way or another and we'll all have to look for new tasks again!"

These words didn't sound very comforting, but they brought me back down to earth. There was really no point in mourning past opportunities.

In the clear air of this April day, I could make out the bluish outline of the Spitzerberg in the distance. Weekend after weekend we would hang around there, gripped by the passion of gliding. On fine days, ten or more of the motorless giant birds would circle around their eyrie like vultures. My friend, Hans Rittner, taught me how to fly gliders in a major and minor key, even though my first "air jumps" were many years ago. I was no longer an apprentice at Spitzerberg, I had already passed my master's examination.

How the world had changed for me when I sat at the controls of a "standardized school glider" for the first time on a beautiful autumn day in 1935. Month after month we had worked almost every evening under the direction of our Bromberg "Wastl" on this, "our" airplane, until one day it was finished and stood in the hangar smelling of paint and barely dried cold glue. Only today can I appreciate the dedication and sense of duty with which this man sacrificed all his free time and many a weekend for us. At the time, we somehow took it for granted.

The year before, I had taken part in a competition with a model plane I had built myself. My father, who had contributed several marks of pocket money, was full of praise for the really well-made model, which had a wingspan of almost $1\frac{1}{2}$ meters. I was surprised myself when the first tests showed that it had excellent flight characteristics.

One Sunday there was a public model competition organized by the Fliegerschar, in which I took part. A light easterly wind created ideal conditions for us. I watched the launches of my fellow pilots with excitement. Some models covered considerable distances; some failures were due to the model being launched too forcefully and uncleanly. Finally it was my turn. Comrades gave me some final advice.

I held the model by the skid with my left hand and the tail with my right.

I took a few steps and pushed lightly with my right hand when I felt that the lift must be enough. The model stayed completely horizontal and calm in the wind, rose a few meters and pushed off to the left. Like a large bird of prey, it floated down the slope of the "Schöne Aussicht" towards Fürstätt. I got scared when it made no attempt to descend. I started to run: I knew that if it crashed into a tree or a barn, it would be the end of a new model for this year. The material was too expensive for me. After a long flight, it touched down on the edge of a field far to the north of Fürstätt. Cheers and applause from the spectators followed me. My father was thrilled. He was as proud as if he had won first prize himself. He gave me a certificate and a pilot's book, Udet, "Mein Fliegerleben". This first success sparked a restless restlessness in me. I wanted to know. There had to be more to achieve.

Then came that fall day in 1935, when what seemed almost impossible to my father had suddenly become a reality. With tears of joy in his eyes, he sat at the edge of the forest and watched our preparations. Bromberger "Wastl" gave me final instructions. He checked that I was properly strapped in. Trembling with excitement, I tightened the leather crash helmet and put the goggles over my eyes. "Wastl" raised his hand. My comrades took up the rubber ropes on either side, two others held the tips of the wings horizontally.

"Starting team ready?" I shouted as loud as I could.

"Ready!" came from the holding team and the ropes.

I kept saying to myself: "Easy, easy, easy!" Then I shouted: "Take off your clothes!"

My companions began to stretch the rubber ropes slowly, step by step, at an angle of about 45°. I observed the tension in the ropes. They began to vibrate. I shouted a command again:

"Run!"

They ran as fast as the tension of the ropes would allow. The buzzing vibration of the rubber cords increased. The time had come.

"Go!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

A jolt pressed me against the leather-upholstered seat. I lightly took the truncheon against my body. The advice of "Wastl" rang in my ears:

"Just don't pull too hard or you'll stall the airplane and crash!"

I had taken off and was floating. I sailed down the slope at a height of just a few meters. The tensioning ropes howled. The glider leaned slightly to the right, I carefully moved the stick to the left and stepped lightly on the

left pedal. The plane righted itself and gained height. I pushed back a little. The ground came towards me. Another slight pull and I touched down. Shaking and roaring, the ESG glided over the soft soil, then settled down on the left-hand surface. I must have covered perhaps three hundred meters. Seat belts down, crash helmet and goggles off and "got out". I waved up to my father. With his hat in his hand, he waved back and then walked away quickly. I knew why.

My comrades came running to help me back. I thought everything over again, tried to recognize mistakes. It was done. It had only been a few seconds, but it was my first flight. There were many more to come. Would other people ever be able to grasp the happiness that overtakes a boy at such moments? Hardly!

Our train overtook troop transport trains at almost every station. Tensions in the Balkans had risen to threatening levels. There were signs of developments that could be dangerous for the German Reich.

On March 25, 1941, the Yugoslav government declared its accession to the Three-Power Pact. The intentions of the Reich government were clear: the threat to the Balkans posed by the British Expeditionary Force that had landed in Greece had to be stopped. The forces that had entered Bulgaria were quite capable of forcing quick decisions in the Macedonian-Greek border area. On the day of my arrival in Germany, March 27, there was a "military coup" in Belgrade against Prince Regent Paul and his government. The Prince Regent had to flee. The underage Peter II was proclaimed king. The leader of the coup was the Anglophile General Simovich, who was surprisingly joined by the Croatian peasant leader Matschek, against the resistance of some of his supporters.

Although I had studied the Yugoslavian situation in detail, the whole development was a mystery to me. How could I know at that time that a strategy inspired by the Soviets was being applied here, which apparently played to the advantage of the Western powers, but was in fact part of a policy aimed directly against the German Reich. Sooner or later, this strategy was bound to enable the USSR to eliminate both the Anglophile and Germanophile forces in the Balkans. In any case, the Soviets were the winners. A few days later, this bleak picture brightened in a flash.

Clearance by the Hungarian border officials in Hegyeshalom also went smoothly. In the late afternoon, our train rolled into Budapest Central Station. Memories came flooding back: Whitsun 1939, when I had spent an eventful week's vacation here with some of my comrades.

As soon as we had left the car to stretch our legs during our stay, two gentlemen approached the doctor and greeted him with great cordiality. One of them, tall, slim and very elegantly dressed, was Hungarian. His pronunciation was unmistakable. The other was of medium height and looked more like a civil servant. There was no doubt that he was German. My surprise increased when Dr. Barth spoke to his acquaintance in fluent Hungarian. He asked me to excuse him for a while. Outside the arrivals hall, almost at the end of the platform, I saw the gentlemen walking up and down, engrossed in conversation. After the other gentleman also wanted to leave the compartment, I had no choice but to "hold the fort". The gentlemen only returned shortly before the train left. From their worried expressions I gathered that they had not exactly exchanged messages of joy. Dr. Barth waved me out and introduced me. The Hungarian had a very winning way of speaking. Without much ado, he included me in the farewell.

"Well, young comrade, what's the word again? "Break a leg!" he said with his unmistakable Hungarian accent and patted me on the shoulder.

When the train had started moving, the doctor withdrew quietly and thoughtfully into his corner. I wonder what was going on in his head.

He suddenly broke his silence and leaned over to me:

"The Soviet Union has signed a friendship and non-aggression pact with the new Yugoslav government." I sat there speechless for a while and thought about what I had heard.

"Doctor, I know nothing about politics and even less about diplomacy, but my common sense tells me that this agreement is directed against the German Reich. If I conclude a pact with a government that has just opened hostilities against a third party, I am making it quite clear that my intentions are also directed against that third party."

"You are absolutely right in your judgment. Keep that to yourself for now. We may know more tomorrow."

Spring had taken possession of the Puszta. The setting sun flooded the lush green of the pastures and fields with its warm light. Here and there a small farmhouse with a towering fountain tree. The strange charm that this land radiated to every stranger came from the full fertility of the heavy soil. One never tired of looking.

We arrived in Szolnok in the early evening. At this large railroad junction, the unrest that had gripped this country was doubly palpable. Hundreds of Honved reservists, numerous German uniforms in between,

crowded the platform. We left the carriage as the train had a longer stop. It was a beautiful evening. The deep blue sky would soon turn to dark night. A mild southerly wind carried the heavy scent of Hungarian soil over to us. I watched the busy train traffic thoughtfully. Would there be war here too? No doubt: Hungarian regiments were also called to the flags. What could the Hungarians do? A small, self-confident people, torn between the millstones of the great powers, they always gave the wheat for the bread in the history of this region.

While an excavator was loading coal onto the tender of the locomotive and fresh water was being poured into the boilers, I heard the quiet rolling of the engines of a very high-flying airplane. I scanned the sky and spotted a contrail to the north-east. As far as my eyes could see, I could follow the path of the plane. While I was still trying to make out who was up there, the doctor followed my gaze:

"The machine flies at least 6000 m high," I said.

"Nothing special, they can go even higher."

When I looked at him questioningly, Dr. Barth replied:

"Almost certainly a Soviet long-range reconnaissance plane or a courier plane for the Communists in Bosnia or Montenegro. Since the Soviets hold several world altitude records, which are at 13,000 m, I have to assume that this aircraft has not reached the limit of its capabilities either."

"I don't quite understand that. We're not at war with Russia. What's a long-range reconnaissance plane doing here? Perhaps the Reich government or the Hungarian government has given overflight permission."

"Oh, God forbid, the Bolsheviks don't give a damn about overflight permits. The Romanians have had to tolerate Soviet bombers flying over their territory for years, even granting them technical assistance in the event of emergency landings. It's always war for the Red Army. Remember that!"

"That would allow the conclusion that the current development in Yugoslavia has been prepared for a long time."

"You could say that. After the beginning of the French campaign, our confidants in Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro observed an increasing strengthening of Communist underground activity. Since the party had no organization worth mentioning there, they backed the national-chauvinist forces, whereby the Soviets could still be sure of the support of the British.

I am convinced that if the underground struggle intensifies further, the

Soviets are calculating on a strong German counter-reaction and thus the destruction of a viable, westward-oriented opposition. We estimate that in the last three months alone, around five hundred instructors have been smuggled into Yugoslavia via Bulgaria and have been very active there. A war can therefore only be a matter of hours."

"If things are like this, why didn't the Reich government do something about this digging in time? I don't understand the British either. If there are far-sighted statesmen at work there, they must also have recognized the intentions of the Soviet leadership. A further expansion of the war must be prevented by all diplomatic means still available."

A faint smile crossed the face of this enigmatic man:

"It is long too late for talks. The decisive mistake made not only by the German leadership, but also by the leaders of the Western powers, is that none of these statesmen ever took the time to really work through the writings of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Had they done so, they would have realized long ago that the wars since 1917 have taken a different form. Even in my closest circle of friends I repeatedly encounter a lack of understanding. Revolutionaries who know Clausewitz better than the military are not only a serious danger to their people, but also to the whole world.

You will soon realize that we are relatively well informed about some of what is going on over there. Our Romanian friends have built up an excellent intelligence network that reaches deep into the USSR.

Far more alarming, however, is the fact that the Soviet leadership has extended its spy network throughout the Reich and the occupied territories, providing it with astonishingly concrete intelligence. We have a copy of a circular letter to higher commanders of the Red Army which corresponds almost word for word to the minutes of a briefing at headquarters. This proves that the Soviets' sources can be found at almost all levels of command. Unfortunately, we have not yet succeeded in cutting these wires. This warning also applies to you. Maintain the strictest silence towards everyone. Under no circumstances may it become known what orders you have to carry out. The mere fact that you are seen in my company will be cause for close surveillance."

We took our seats in our compartment again. The third passenger seemed to be taking a nap. He had put his coat over his face.

Long shadows had settled over the Pusztá. How much more beautiful it would have been if there had been no war to cover this picture with a veil

of gloomy thoughts. The tender young green of the trees and bushes, the young shoots of the seeds in the endless fields, the colorful variegation of the gardens, I had never seen this land more beautiful.

I crossed the Romanian border for the third time in a year. A border that cuts so deeply into the lives of the people the world looked a lot friendlier. Only Richard L. slept like the dead. We went to the back of the dining car to drink a cup of hot coffee - it was still bean coffee despite being the second year of the war - to finally drive the sleep from our limbs.

Dr. Barth asked me about my impressions of Romania so far. He listened attentively to my descriptions. I was surprised at how many of the people I had met over the last few months were not unknown to him either. He rarely interrupted me. He was not only a good teacher, he was also an equally good listener.

It opened my eyes to problems that I had carelessly passed by, but which were very important for assessing the whole.

"You know," he said, "as a young person, you tend to either make sweeping judgments or condemn everything. Don't worry, I understand you better than you think.

If you assume, for example, that Adolf Hitler succeeded in creating a strong state supported by the unified will of the party, you are mistaken. In none of the Western plutocracies could the tensions be greater than between the multitude of 'house power organizations'⁽¹⁾ which the Führer's many 'subordinates'⁽¹⁾ built up for themselves during the period of struggle. In one or two generations it may be that a unified way of thinking and acting will emerge from this bubbling brew. In fact, it was and still is the case today that the Führer has difficulty reconciling this multitude of interests.

Basically, the 'Führerbefehl' so often mentioned today is nothing more than an "alibi" for the lack of personal responsibility of those who receive orders. God knows, not for the countryman who does his duty in the field, but for the indifferent coterie of all shades who fatten themselves on the fleshpots of power. Who, however - and I dare say this - should the Reich lose this war again, will be the first to shout: "Crucify him!"

You think that's piggish? No, it's human, because an animal wouldn't behave like that.

Be very cautious over the next few weeks. I can only warn you again and again. Nowhere are there so many enemy agents of German origin as in Bucharest or Sofia. Here you are among yourselves and can wait quietly

for the end of the war. You move around under the protection of the uniform of the German Wehrmacht, are protected from the annoying eyes of the district leader at home, play the hero on vacation and practice treason here.

I know you think I'm an incorrigible pessimist, but don't worry. I am a convinced German-Austrian and a passionate Greater German. I was one before Hitler, I am one with Hitler and, God willing, I will be one after Hitler.

I was very interested in what you said about your work in Vienna. There was a lot of valuable material in Austrian archives.

Just one example: the archives of the Austrian General Staff contained a dossier on Stalin that was uniquely dramatic. An old comrade-in-arms of Stalin had collected these documents and put them on record in Vienna after his escape from the G.P.U. henchmen. You would feel sick in the face of the abundance of nastiness of which this man was and is capable. Published, these documents would have been the ideal cure for the communist disease. Before 1938, Austria shied away from publishing them for political reasons, and after 1938 this dossier, like many others, disappeared into the RSHA archives. No one knows where it has remained. I am convinced that not even Hitler ever got to see it.

You know, the concerns that your friend Dr. Stefan expressed about General J. Antonescu are quite justified. Not because of the general himself - he is a soldier from head to toe - but because of the dubious characters he surrounded himself with in the emergency situation last summer and to whom he is in many respects at the mercy of."

Yet another problem worth thinking about.

Dr. Barth's words brought the days between 21.1. and 23.1.41 back to my memory. In mid-January I had gone out to Lake Snagow with some Romanian and German friends. Mountains of snow had fallen and it was difficult to make any progress. We were guests of a well-known university professor who was held in high esteem by the people and was also respected by his opponents. Even though I couldn't always follow the conversation, I couldn't separate the people. Hungarians on both sides, Germans on both sides.

When I thought about everything I had experienced in the few months I had been in Romania and the events that had befallen me and compared them with Dr. Barth's description of the situation, I saw many things in a different light.

A few days after our arrival in Romania, on the occasion of an invitation from German friends, I met members of the "Iron Guard" for the first time. I experienced an unprecedented hospitality, but also the mythical comradeship of men who were not only filled with a fervent love for their fatherland, but also a fanatical hatred of the communists. A strangely orthodox humility contrasted with a feverish anti-Semitism that I knew nothing about despite my Hitler youth.

This conspiratorial blood brotherhood fascinated me from the very beginning. The proud self-confidence of the "Legionnaires" - as they called themselves - could not fail to appeal to broad circles of academic youth, the young officer corps and the orthodox clergy. A willingness to sacrifice to the point of giving one's life, comradeship, justice and order must have acted like a magnet in a place where for centuries the rule of the High Porte and the brutal oppression of the Tsardom had led to unprecedented mismanagement and corruption. If at first I exercised the restraint imposed on us towards my new friends, it soon became a feeling that I was one of them. The consequences were not long in coming; our people also quickly realized how valuable these ties of mine were for us.

In the first days of November, Mircea D. had left me a message at the hotel that he would pick me up in the evening. I'd just had time to put on my civilian clothes when they came rushing into the room, all in a state of intense excitement. They seemed to be seized by a severe fever.

We drove at breakneck speed to one of the northern districts of Bucharest. We stopped on a side street of the highway. One of the legionnaires jumped out of the car and exchanged a few words with the guards. We were immediately let in and escorted to an annex of the large house, which looked like a boyar's villa. We entered through a side entrance. Mircea gave me his black cloak. In the semi-darkness of the large room, we could hear an almost conspiratorial agreement, despite the excitement in which everyone had found themselves. I was immediately part of it too. Only a few wore civilian clothes, the majority of those present wore the green shirt of the Legion. At the front of the room was a picture of the man who seemed to be the leader of these men even in death: Capitan Codreanu. Next to him was the sign of the Iron Guard, the bars.

At the hint of a post at the door, everyone rose from their seats. A few men in the Legionnaire's uniform entered the room and took their seats behind the tables at the front. The chairman read out a document and then put a question to those present, which everyone answered together. An

eerie silence fell.

Through a side door, two young legionnaires led in a man who bore all the signs of considerable maltreatment. His uniform made him recognizable as a former soldier or gendarme.

The chairman asked the defendant a few questions about himself, which he answered quickly and straightforwardly. He then read out another document and put another question to him. The defendant remained silent for a long time and then began to speak slowly and haltingly. I could understand a lot of it, Mircea translated the rest:

"He (the man presented) had belonged to a platoon of gendarmes who were to pick up prisoners in Rimnicul Sarat on 28.11.38 under the command of two police officers. Only there were they told that they were imprisoned legionnaires. To their horror, they then informed the two officers that the legionnaires would be executed. One of the majors had shown them how the prisoners could be quickly killed with a rope noose thrown over their heads from behind. The gendarmes had to lead the legionnaires into the wagons in the prison yard. As far as he remembered, there were 10 prisoners in one bus and only four in the other. The legionnaires were shackled to their seats by their arms and legs. As he now knew, the prisoner handed over to him was Corneliu Codreanu. The wagons had stopped in a forest near Tincabesti. Major Dinulescu had left the car. During this time, his prisoner tried to speak to him. After a short time, the officer returned and ordered the execution at gunpoint. Each of the gendarmes then threw the rope noose around the neck of the legionnaire sitting in front of him, tightened it and gagged him. In his opinion, the legionnaire was dead in less than a minute.

They then drove on to the Jilava prison and arrived there in the morning. In the courtyard of the fortress, the dead prisoners were dragged out of the wagon and laid next to each other. For a reason unknown to him, the officers walked along the row and fired several shots into the corpses. A mass grave had been prepared at the edge of the old trench wall. The bodies were thrown into it and buried without any external markings.

In an office room of the prison, they were then forced to sign a statement that Codreanu and his companions had tried to escape. They were shot by the police officers accompanying them.

When he heard the official statement from the government on the same day, he was very shocked and immediately said to himself that this could not end well.

As soon as the presenter had finished, a tremendous excitement gripped those present. Everyone rose from their seats. Some sang the old hymn of the Legion, while the chairman again read out a document, giving the whole thing the character of a "Rütli oath".

What was to come was absolutely clear to me: revenge, bloody revenge. On the way back to the center, the faces of my companions reflected anger and unbridled hatred. Only a few words were exchanged.

I myself walked down Boulevard Elisabeta to the home of the Reich German colony and retreated to a quiet corner. I thought again about what I had experienced and heard. The police officers could not have carried out the mass murder on their own responsibility. They must have had the approval of the Minister of the Interior, if not the consent of the King. An irrepressible anger began to rise in me too. What a gruesome game had been played here!

On the afternoon of one of the last days of November 1940, I was visiting a family friend in Dumbrava Rosie. As I turned into the street coming from the British legation, I heard shots. From a nearby house came the shrill screams of women. A domestic worker fell into the street. As far as I could tell from her confused wailing, her master had just been murdered. A few seconds later, two heavy cars with legionnaires raced past. I had barely entered the house and greeted my friends when the phone rang. One of my friends asked the lady of the house if "Sfintu Gheorghe" was there. She handed me the phone. Jonel P. was on the other end of the line.

"Gheorghe, are you in civilian clothes?" he groaned in great excitement.

"No," I replied, "but I can change quickly." "Bine, get ready quickly, we'll pick you up in half an hour."

I had already sensed the tremendous tension in the air on the way. An excitement had spread that can only be felt by the population before major decisions or revolutions. Everywhere you went, you could hear discussions breaking out, others were shyly pushing their way along the walls of houses and trying to get inside as quickly as possible.

The half hour had turned into two or more. We had long been sitting down to dinner when the bell rang several times. My host opened the door. He came back after a few seconds.

"Two legionnaires are outside and want to pick you up."

He whispered softly in my ear:

"Be careful, I know one of them. He was sentenced to a severe punishment before the war."

I thought I had to disagree:

"I've only known these men for a few weeks, but I consider them my friends. So far, I've had no reason to doubt their sincerity."

I quickly took a seat in the back of the second car. We drove at high speed through the deserted suburbs towards Giurgiu. We were stopped and checked several times by armed legionnaires. After about 20 kilometers, we turned off the road and drove into a fortress-like building: the Jilava penitentiary. Men with lanterns and torches showed us the way. Ghostly figures in black fur hats and black cloaks hurried past us. Excited voices mingled with low murmurs to the accompaniment of a hellish scene. My nerves were on edge. The blazing glow of the torches was brightened up here and there by the glaring beams of individual hand-held spotlights that flashed across incoming vehicles. A squad of heavily armed men hurried past us towards the gate.

My companions exchanged a few words with other legionnaires. By the light of a flashlight I recognized a gentleman from the German SD who was having an animated conversation with legionnaires. In the semi-darkness of a house wall, interrupted only by low openings that looked more like embrasures than windows, we went to a passageway secured by a heavy iron door. By the light of a flashlight, we felt our way down a few steps, then we were obviously in the moat of the old fortifications. To our right was a wall which, after about 50 meters, formed a right angle to a 5-6 meter high earth wall. At the end of this field stood numerous men in fur hats, as well as officers in uniform. Hand lamps and torches illuminated a troop of men working in the corner of the rampart. One after the other we stumbled over through the wet grass, following the half-loud conversation and the clattering of tools. There was a gap under the low-hanging branches of the bushes and trees on the embankment, and we squeezed into it.

A few meters in front of us, a deep pit had been dug, with only the workers' caps sticking out. Two spotlights cast their light on the side of the pit facing away from us. We could only guess what was going on there. Next to the workers stood men in white coats, quietly giving instructions. Every now and then they handed up objects and items of clothing that they had removed from the sandy earth of the pit.

I quietly asked Mircea, who was standing right next to me:

"Who is being dug up here?"

In the flickering light of a nearby torch, I saw tears running down the face of this otherwise tough man. Not tears of grief, tears of impotent rage. As he slowly turned towards me, only one name came from his lips:

"Capitan Codreanu!"

A shiver coursed through my body. I flinched as if I had been hit by a jet of ice-cold water. My friends were surprised at the effect of these words. Petru S., a student I had only known for a few days, put his fur jacket around my shoulders. So that was what had sent the whole of Bucharest into a feverish frenzy, triggering this maelstrom of events that no Romanian could escape.

On the long side of the pit, just a few meters away from us, stood an elderly legionnaire wearing a long, black cloak around his shoulders. He stared down into the pit in silence. Every now and then he stroked his face, which bore so much resemblance to Codreanu's image, with a quick movement of his hand. He could have been his father.

I turned to Mircea again:

"Who is that gentleman over there?"

"The Colonel," he replied in awe.

At first I didn't know what to make of it. The following day I found out from my German friends who was meant: Colonel Zavoianu, one of Codreanu's oldest comrades-in-arms. The head of the Securitate, Moruzov, had had his hands dipped in boiling olive oil when he was arrested in 1938 in order to extort a confession. What hatred must have been burning in this man!

The headlights focused on a spot in the pit again. The scraping and scratching of the shovels stopped. The men in the white coats bent down. Wild shouts rang out from the opposite side. A tarpaulin was passed down. After a while, two gendarmes lifted the filled tarpaulin.

The cloth was spread out next to the pit. In the light of the lamps and torches I saw a dark something, the outline of a skull, the remains of clothes. Wild screams rang out, which I interpreted as horrible curses! In the midst of the confusion of voices, a voice rang out whose steely sound will remain unforgettable to me:

"Executare!"

The colonel had given this gruesome order. A few men broke away from the group and ran over to the wall. I stepped back a little and tried to see what was going on on the other side of the small meadow. One man began

a loud wail that sounded even more heartbreaking in Romanian. I couldn't make out what was really going on there.

On the way back to the city, Petru broke the silence. On the colonel's orders, up to ten well-known public figures were executed for every legionary dug up. Men who were held responsible by the legionaries for the murder of Codreanu and his thirteen followers. They were strangled with a rope noose. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! The avenging angel raced through Romania.

Mircea and Petru took me back to the car. Shaken by what we had experienced, we all kept silent. It was only on the way back that Mircea mentioned that he had gathered from the doctors' conversations that the corpses were probably in such poor condition because they had been doused with acid before being cremated to make it impossible to determine the cause of death.

My comrades dropped me off in front of the Circul Militar. From there it was only a few steps to my hotel. Close to collapse, I threw myself on the bed. I had literally fallen ill. A fever shook me.

Well-known personalities were among those executed - including some who enjoyed a high reputation in Germany. Consul Ranger assured me a few days later that it was only thanks to the resolute intervention of the envoy Fabricius and the special envoy Neubacher that this senseless killing came to an end. The pro-German industrialist Gigurtu and the former Prime Minister Tatarescu were only just saved from being hanged. In addition to thousands of guilty people, such as General Argheseanu, innocent people like Nicolae Jorga (one of the most important Romanian scientists and politicians) and Virgil Madgearu (an internationally recognized economist) also died an agonizing death.

Night had long since fallen when our train reached the border between Lököshaza and Curtici. Once again I was able to witness the partly amusing, partly sad spectacle, which seemed to me to be a sign of the irreconcilable enmity between Hungarians and Romanians. The Hungarians uncoupled their modern D-train locomotive and replaced it with an older shunting locomotive. With a snarl, it laboriously pulled the long train across the border. Only in Curtici was a heavy locomotive hauled again. On my first trip across the border, a Hungarian railwayman had told us in all seriousness that the reason they couldn't send a modern locomotive across the border was that the Romanians would steal anything that wasn't nailed down, maybe even the locomotive. When we laughed uproariously at this, he left us cursing and walked off.

We settled into the compartment for a long night. The seats pulled together made an almost ideal resting place. In the semi-darkness spread by the small night light, I noticed that the other passenger was looking at me closely.

"Where are you going?" he asked me abruptly.

The question surprised me, as he had proved to be very taciturn so far. Dr. Barth gave me a warning look between half-closed eyelids.

"To Bucharest," I replied hesitantly, hoping that he would realize that I wasn't interested in talking to him.

"Do you already know Bucharest?" came the next question very firmly.

"Yes, I think so."

"What kind of countryman are you?" he asked again.

Now it was time to be careful, the man had a method.

"I am Bavarian!"

"I thought so," he replied.

"What are you doing in Bucharest?" the questions continued.

Dr. Barth watched me with a smile, obviously wanting to see how I would get out of the affair.

"I work there for a German company," I replied.

"I see," he said with a grin, "and this company issues service tickets and lets its employees travel in the courier compartment of the German Wehrmacht."

He grinned at me unabashedly. I glanced at Dr. Barth, looking for help. He had his eyes closed but seemed to be visibly struggling to hold back a laugh. Damn, now the questions were getting awkward.

An old principle came to mind: Questions can only be ended by asking questions. It was time for me to put on the brakes.

"Do you come to Bucharest often?" I asked back.

"Yes, very often."

The next question had to follow if I wanted to get my peace at some point.

"Then surely you already speak Romanian well?"

"Almost as good as German," he replied readily.

"If I heard correctly, you are Viennese?"

"Gosh, you almost guessed it," the gentleman laughed at me, "I've lived in Vienna for decades, but I was born in Sibiu."

"In Sibiu," I asked in surprise, "my bride was also born in Sibiu."

I immediately realized that I had made a mistake, but it was too late.

"Your bride is from Sibiu?"

Suddenly his gaze had taken on something scrutinizing.

"Where does your bride live, in Herrmannstadt?"

"No, in Bucharest. But she was actually always German."

He seemed to think for a moment.

"An Imperial German born in Sibiu? There aren't many," he asked, turning more to himself.

"Is your bride's name Jutta by any chance?"

This question had hit home. I almost fell off my seat in surprise. How was this man supposed to know my bride?

"Yes, actually, my bride's name is Jutta!" I replied and sat up to take a closer look at my counterpart.

"Your question is no coincidence, is it?"

"No, not at all," he replied, shaking with laughter, "because I'm kind of the bride's uncle. I am Richard Ludrowsky."

That was a surprise. He also jumped up, grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me back and forth, laughing loudly. I was so speechless that I couldn't find the words. Dr. Barth was sitting in his corner, also shaking with laughter. I must have made a terribly stupid face. Tears were literally streaming down his cheeks. I felt betrayed. Was this a set-up?

"Did you know that, Doctor?" I asked meekly.

"No, really not!"

He was still bent over with laughter.

"But if you two are related in a way, we can admit, Richard, that we've known each other since we were cadets."

Now I was completely devastated. These two men had known each other for decades, they were good friends, and they managed to sit in a compartment for 12 hours and act as if they were complete strangers. Afterwards, however, I realized that Dr. Barth had spoken to me very openly about the situation. He had made statements that were not entirely harmless in front of a stranger.

Richard was still laughing. He couldn't seem to find an end to it.

"This must be celebrated," he said, "come with me to the dining car."

He addressed me as if it had always been like that.

"Be careful," came the warning voice of Dr. Barth, "he'll drink a whole company under the table!"

Hours had passed before we returned to our compartment, quite buzzed. Dr. Barth didn't seem to hear us.

How small the world was and what coincidences determine our lives. We met often enough later on, but always when neither of us expected it. I

never found out what his real duties were. But I knew that from that moment on I had another "guardian angel".

Night had fallen like a black curtain in front of the windows. The boundary between heaven and earth was blurred. The distant lights could no longer be made out. Only rarely did a shrill whistle from the locomotive interrupt the steady roar of the wheels.

Outside was Transylvania. Arable land from eight hundred years of German culture. Fortified churches that had withstood the storms of the Mongols as well as the hordes of the High Gate. What a type of people Marco Polo found in the steppes of Mongolia as well as on the barren rocky heights of Persia. Carried off by the cruel despotism of powerful khans, they often held their own for two to three hundred years and preserved their cultural heritage there too. These rulers quickly recognized the treasures that had fallen into their hands: skilled miners, artistic blacksmiths, energetic craftsmen, hard-working farmers, talented cattle breeders. Even these otherwise feared rulers knew how to guard such treasures.

Sure, I had already seen a lot of the world by the time the war started in 1939. I had cycled through Germany, from Lake Constance all the way up to the chalk coasts of the island of Rügen. We stood at the German heroes' cemeteries in France. We pedaled all the way to Rome and Naples. We camped in the far north on Lake Mälär. We were left with unforgettable impressions. But this space not only forced fleeting impressions on the traveler, it forced them to experience it for themselves. The traveler was placed in the midst of history come to life. It was the diversity in the coexistence and togetherness of the countless peoples that gave this area its character that also drew me into the maelstrom of tensions and conflicts that such stormy zones of world politics always produce. Even the ground on which these people lived seemed to reflect the heat of the friction that took place in and on it.

My thoughts rushed back to that memorable evening of November 9, 1940. Memorable, not because of the significance of the hour, memorable because of the events it ushered in. I was invited to a celebration of the Reich German colony with some of my comrades. At the end of the event, we were invited by friends into the colony's home. A lively discussion about political developments in the Balkans broke out at one of the tables. The differences - indeed, contrasts - in opinions between those who had

often lived here for a generation or longer and those who had only lived and worked here for a few weeks or months became clear.

I was surprised by the vehemence with which the Reich government's policy towards Romania was met with rejection. Not only because of the expected replacement of the envoy Dr. Fabricius by the SA-Obergruppenführer v. Killinger, but above all because the Vienna Arbitration Award had still been imposed on this country at a time when it was already foreseeable that Romania would become an indispensable partner in the coming disputes with the USSR. One of the harshest critics was an elderly gentleman, retired cavalry captain Kranzbühler, who condemned the policy towards Romania with biting derision and ironically glossed over the diplomatic qualities of the new envoy, whom he obviously knew from his Freikorps days. Years later, it became clear just how right he was.

We set off shortly after midnight. I joined a group that included a family friend. We walked up Elisabeta, which was still lively despite the late hour, along Boulevard Bratianu to the Aro Cinema, then towards Aurel Vlaicu. Conversations kept revolving around the latest political developments, although the ladies kept trying to give the conversations a less serious turn.

After a brief farewell, I got into a cab and drove out to the Romanian air warfare school Pipera, where part of my unit was housed. There was still light coming in from some of the windows. It seemed that I was not the last person to return home. I hurried up to my room, undressed and sat on the edge of my bed to make a few more entries in my diary.

Still dominated by the evening's conversations, I was about to lock up some documents when my feet seemed to leave me. The floor shook, the ceiling light swung back and forth, the building rumbled slightly. No sooner had I realized that the earth was shaking than silence returned. One of my neighbors rushed in and asked, his face still pale from the initial shock, whether I had also felt the tremor. Here and there the sleepy faces of comrades appeared in the doorways, their puzzled looks showing that they had not yet realized the cause of the disturbance. With a few reassuring words, I tried to send the men back to bed. As soon as I was back in my room, I heard a roar, as if the waves of the primeval sea were crashing down on us in a mighty surge. An invisible force seemed to want to lift the house from its foundations and hurl it into a hellish abyss. The table began to slide, the wardrobe toppled over, the iron bed rolled to the middle of the room. With two or three mighty leaps, skipping five or six steps at once, I chased down the stairs. The walls threatened to burst, cracks as thick as my

arm flashed like lightning across the walls, pieces of the ceiling plaster as heavy as a tent came crashing down and covered everything in acrid clouds of dust. While I was still looking around helplessly and helplessly, an outbuilding collapsed. Fearful shouts testified to the panic that had gripped everyone. As quickly as the quake had struck us, it was over in a flash. A few seconds had been enough to make us realize how small man's powers were compared to the forces of nature. We cautiously entered the house to inspect the damage. It was truly a miracle that the walls were still standing. Sensing that our help would soon be needed, we got dressed. I packed my things, because even after the first inspection it was clear to me that we could no longer live here. The slightest aftershock could cause the house to collapse.

Barely an hour had passed when the first bad news arrived from the city. Standby orders had been issued for the training troops. Countless houses had collapsed. The death toll was in the thousands. Several hundred people died in the collapse of the Carlton tower block alone. Many were killed by falling chimneys and parts of the facade. It was only in the light of the following day that the full extent of the damage became apparent. Once again, we had escaped. Was it a warning from God?

Despite the wine-soaked tiredness, I couldn't sleep. I stepped out into the corridor and tried to recognize a sign in the dark that would have made it easier to find my way, but only impenetrable darkness accompanied the train's trail of lights. Only rarely did the lanterns of deserted stations cast their light on the faces of the sleeping passengers.

My thoughts rushed ahead of the train to Bucharest. Did Jutta know that I would be back with her in just a few hours?

Certainly not, because we had prepared ourselves for a long separation. Maybe Jutta's mother? When we said goodbye, she had said in passing that I would be back soon. She would know that. A strange woman, with an almost uncanny sense for the course of events. It seemed to me that there were quite a few people in this country who had something like a "sixth sense". Aviators are also superstitious by nature.

But one experience stayed with me for the rest of my life. On one of the first days of our stay in Bucharest, my friend Otto St. and I wanted to go to one of the elegant night bars, which for us German "provincials" had something cosmopolitan about them and therefore excited our imagination accordingly. As usual, I had long since finished and waited in the hall of

our small hotel until my friend was ready to arrive. While I skimmed through the newspapers on the table, I heard an exchange of words from reception.

An old gypsy woman wanted to sell flowers to hotel guests and caused the boss's displeasure. More amused than attentive, I watched the futile attempts to get the old woman out again without causing a great stir. Again and again, in a strangely insistent voice, she asked to be allowed to stay.

Otto stopped on one of the lowest steps and laughed heartily at the little argument. Some of the hotel guests seemed to be taking sides with the old lady, at least that's what it sounded like from a distance. For the sake of peace, the staff finally seemed willing to give in. Otto went to the porter we knew and exchanged a few words with him. Here, too, his natural friendliness had an immediate effect. The porter shouted a few words to the receptionist and the staff immediately let go of the woman. Calm was restored. While my friend was still sitting down with me, the gypsy woman picked up her huge baskets of flowers and came over to us as nimbly as I would never have believed her capable of. What happened next will remain indelibly etched in my memory.

A few meters away from us, she knelt on the ground, put down her baskets and scooted closer to us in this submissive posture. Defensively, we tried to make it clear to her that we had no need for flowers and that we were sorry we couldn't help her. But she wouldn't let up. She remained close to me in a half-kneeling, half-sitting position, gave me a small bunch of violets and looked at me impassively. She didn't seem to hear our objections. I wanted to give her a 100 lei piece, but she refused very firmly.

A fascinating picture presented itself to us. Above her narrow face, covered with a thousand wrinkles, her dark hair, not yet showing a thread of gray, was brushed back smoothly. She had strikingly large gemstones in her ears, which must have been set in real gold. There were rows of colorful necklaces around her neck. While the hand-embroidered Romanian blouses were always small marvels of women's work, what the old woman was wearing was a real treasure, a masterpiece of ornamentation and colorful variety. Over the blouse she wore a lambskin vest, also richly embroidered. Around her hips she had wrapped one of the colorful, hand-woven skirts often seen on Romanian peasant or gypsy women. Even Otto, who otherwise couldn't be disturbed so easily, was constantly watching the old woman. It was impossible to estimate her age, but she must have been very beautiful once. I knew that gypsy women age early. She could just as easily be 50 as 70. She still looked at me

impassively.

I tried one last time.

"Thank you very much for the beautiful bunch of violets, but I don't have anyone to give them to. We don't speak Romanian either. Try to sell your flowers to the other guests."

She didn't seem to pay any attention to my words. She was still looking at me as if she wanted to hypnotize me, then she began to speak in a bumpy German:

"Oh, young sir, you don't need to buy flowers. But you soon need flowers for young girl. You will have a bride when winter is over. I know that."

Otto began to laugh so heartily that everyone looked over at us.

"My dear, she knows you, so be careful."

The gypsy didn't even look at him.

"You will have a young wife. You will have a son. You will have to go out into a great war. You are sick, you are bloody, but alive. Then far away. Wife gone, son gone, long time away, but then come back. You're bloody again, there's a lot of blood around you. Slowly get well again. Sometimes your life is like this, sometimes like that. Not a nice life. Then another child, maybe a daughter.

Always fighting. Many enemies around you, but good friends. Enemies cannot harm you. Once known to many people. But soon to die."

I was deeply affected. She had looked at me continuously, with a gaze that I couldn't avoid. And yet there was something soothing, even kind, about those eyes. You couldn't be angry with the old woman.

Then something happened that almost ruined the whole evening. She suddenly turned to Otto.

"You, young sir, will soon need flowers too. Not flowers for bride, not flowers for young wife. Flowers for small hill of earth!"

She hurriedly uttered these words, jumped up quickly, grabbed her baskets and was gone. She didn't sell a single flower. She disappeared from the face of the earth. Many weeks later, I thought I recognized her in a garden pub on the outskirts of town. She seemed to be beckoning to me. Again she disappeared.

My friend sat there as if struck by lightning. A slight pallor spread across his face. His cheerfulness was blown away. We walked thoughtfully over to the Atlantic Bar. He walked beside me, having become monosyllabic.

"Do you believe in such nonsense? Strange, my mother is ill. Is the old woman right?"

I shrugged my shoulders. Everything was soon forgotten in the whirlwind of the Weltstadt Bar program.

Otto St. died on July 3, 1941, shortly after the start of the campaign against Russia. Not an airman's death. Together with his pilot, Uffz. G., he was murdered in a cruel and bestial manner after an emergency landing behind the Soviet front, although both had long since surrendered.

In Burzenland, shortly before Kronstadt, the coming day had finally triumphed over the night. To the east, the wooded heights of the Carpathian Mountains stood out against the hazy blue of the sky. To the south, the snow-covered peaks of the Transylvanian Alps shone. In the compartments, a tired passenger stretched here and there and began to stretch his legs in the corridor. Dr. Barth also came out, gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder and went to the washroom. After a short morning toilet, I had traveled extensively throughout the Soviet Union over the past twenty years. I had many friends among the officers of the Red Army, unfortunately many of them lost their lives under the bullets of the G.P.U.. In any case, I know Russia very well. But I also know Germany. Anyone who was able to observe these developments on both sides as closely as I did immediately recognized that a clash between the two powers was bound to happen.

The new leadership of the empire has achieved incredible things in just a few years. It has aroused the amazement of the world, but also its envy, and envy is also a dangerous driving force in politics.

In 1937, one of the highest Soviet general staff officers once told me during a maneuver:

"The only power in the world that can oppose us is the German Reich under Adolf Hitler. Therefore, our first goal is the destruction of Hitler and his fascist party. According to the words of our great Lenin, war is a means of world revolution, therefore we will wipe out Hitler's Germany as a state in the greatest war in history.*"

I looked at the colonel doubtfully, but he continued his remarks impassively.

"You have doubts? You'd better not, even if you young Germans think you're invincible. We Hungarians have repeatedly warned against such a development, but the German military and political leadership has become so obsessed with success that it has lost sight of the real situation in the world.

Anyone who wants to conduct politics in Europe today must know the

Soviet state, but anyone who wants to know the Soviet state must first and foremost concern himself with the ideological foundations of this state. But anyone who knows the ideological foundations and has grasped them has almost defeated the Soviets. Soviet policy, strategy and tactics are as predictable as the game of chess.

Just one example: when we learned at the end of the Polish campaign that Stalin was proposing to the Reich government that Poland should be wiped out as a state and integrated into the spheres of interest of both sides, we were not expecting anything good. Berlin promptly fell for it. The result was that the Reich put itself on the political defensive internationally. That was exactly what the Soviets wanted. This gave them a free hand in Finland, the Baltic states and Romania."

"I can't believe, Mr. v. Eneky, that our leadership acted so blindly. Perhaps all this happened because of the emergency situation in 1939."

"What can I tell you, young comrade? A few months ago, Hitler asked me for an interview because I am known as an expert on Russia. It's true, this man really does have a unique eye for the essentials, he has to be envied for that. But does this also apply to those around him? That's what matters in politics!

The Reich allowed the war to be forced upon it far too early. Now Hitler has no choice but to attack wherever he can. He will go the same way as Napoleon, and I believe he not only suspects it, he even knows it."

I was lost in deep thought. There was just too much that had been thrown at me in the last few weeks and months.

"Incidentally, the situation has not only become dangerous on the Romanian border. Things also look bad on the Hungarian Carpathian border. In addition, the Soviets recently announced clear claims to Carpatho-Ukraine in Budapest. We have therefore moved troops to the border. One division! What is that?

Since the summer of last year, the Russians have slowly but surely strengthened their large formations on our border. Where there were still 3 rifle divisions in July, there is now the 26th Army with 5 rifle divisions, a motorized rifle division and an armoured brigade. Two more divisions and an armored brigade are on the move. Incidentally, two of the divisions in front of our border are mountain divisions. I wonder why?

You are at a loss now. I can empathize with you. But believe me, we 'old hands' are no different. The Reichsverweser is constantly trying to gain understanding for our situation in Washington and London, but in vain. He stands diplomatically in front of closed doors. The British seem to believe

that after the great 'slaughter' the spoils will fall to them without major losses. A dangerous fallacy, as we shall see.

I know, young comrade, that the Romanians can't smell us Hungarians. I also know that the situation with the Romanians is much more explosive than with us, but we are all in the same boat if it comes to war with the USSR. You see how difficult it sometimes is to do your duty when you run up against a wall of preconceived ideas and incomprehension and can't change anything. You are still supposed to learn here and I hope you do well."

Within a few days, this was the third, almost identical assessment of the situation by different men of different nationalities. They only had one thing in common: a precise knowledge of Soviet conditions. What was a twenty-year-old supposed to say in response? Nothing, you simply had to keep quiet and listen.

What shocked me about this conversation was the assertion, also mentioned here, that there must be traitors somewhere in our leadership. Perhaps even among the generals who were held up to us young soldiers as shining examples of German soldiering.

What shameless meanness was capable of this human soul, which was supposed to be formed in the image of God. It made perfect sense to me that someone could not be in agreement with the aims or intentions of the political leadership, but what I did not understand was that such an attitude led to betrayal of the fatherland, betrayal of millions of innocent people in this nation who were doing their duty in deep faith and great confidence for a better future for our country. Collaborating with the enemy with the aim of plunging one's own country into misfortune was probably the height of characterlessness and stupidity. Anyone who practiced treason must have known that he was not only handing over the government to the power of the victor, but also the entire German people.

"Mr. v. Eneky, may I ask you something else? Do you also have the feeling that the enemy is more informed about our intentions than we suspect?"

"Oh dear, young comrade, that's not just a feeling. I know that, but where are these people? We know the 'wires', we know the recipients, but we still don't know the 'senders', even though we're all working feverishly on them."

"One more question! Do you agree that the USSR intends to occupy the

Balkans in the foreseeable future?"

"This is nothing new, the tsar already had such intentions, only this time they are cloaked in the mantle of world revolution.

Let's take a cool-headed look at the situation: this morning there were 52 Finnish, German, Slovakian, Hungarian and Romanian divisions between the Arctic Ocean and the Black Sea, and over 90 over there. The situation is no different with the air forces. If the Reich does not act soon, it can only lay down its arms. Every week we have 2-3 flights of Russian long-range reconnaissance planes, almost every night overflights by planes of unknown nationality. Then there is the small-scale war being waged by the Americans, British and overseas French in Bulgaria and Romania with their sabotage squads. How does the Wehrmacht leadership intend to get a grip on this situation? It is already foreseeable that entire armies will remain tied up in this area and will be missing on all fronts at crucial moments. The Communists are beginning to build up an underground army in southern Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro, even though the campaign is not yet over."

He stood up and gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder:

"Well, don't despair, you look as if it's been hailing. Life always goes on somehow, that's the only beautiful thing about our existence. Whenever you think the situation is hopeless, there's always a little gap that you can just about slip through. Let's go back to flight control now. The gentlemen will be waiting and impatient."

I downed the rest of my wine and stood up. I looked almost helplessly into the face of this Hungarian officer, whose friendly eyes reminded me so much of my father.

Where could the Almighty be, who would one day sit in judgment over what was happening here before his eyes? How insignificant this human life was! How incomprehensible the elemental forces that opened up before us. How could a human being believe that he was still a ruler when he had long since become a servant, an instrument of an almighty lawgiver? What are you, Mother Earth? Who are you, Father in heaven?

At the front door, Mr. v. Eneky shook my hand:

"Break a leg, young comrade. If you ever find yourself at a loss for words, write to me. If you are ever in Hungary again, give me a call. My number is on the back of this card. I would really look forward to hearing from you again!"

As instructed, I took over another courier bag. The other gentleman

checked my courier credentials, then I followed Dr. Geminus with quick steps to the plane, we had lost a considerable amount of time.

It was raining when we landed in Vienna. There was a thick haze over Aspern airfield. A warm southerly wind brought in milder air. The courier was picked up and said goodbye without much ado. The doctor had a short long-distance conversation and I ate a few bites myself. The pilot had the plane refueled and serviced, then we could continue on to Berlin.

It was a horrible flight. Heavy haze alternated with fog and rain showers. It was real April weather, the likes of which we had hardly seen in Romania.

As expected, we were directed to Gatow airfield. As we flew in from the Havel, we could barely make out the buildings of the air war college. Two cars were waiting in front of the hangars. In one of the cars sat only men in civilian clothes, in the other an air force officer with a non-commissioned officer. I strapped on my two courier bags and had the pilot hand me my suitcase from the luggage compartment, then I said goodbye. In front of the vehicles, Dr. Geminus turned around again and shook my hand:

"I'm sure we'll meet again soon, please give my regards to Mr. Wagner."

I bowed, but was still at a bit of a loss as to who to turn to. The air force officer, a first lieutenant in the anti-aircraft gunnery, came up to me:

"Are you the courier from Bucharest?"

"Yes, Mr. Oberleutnant, are you from the RLM?"

"Yes, I have orders to take you there. Can I see your papers?"

He checked my courier ID, and in the meantime the sergeant stowed away my suitcase. I was forced to keep the courier bags with me. Only now did I see that my companions were heavily armed. I thought that was excessive and conspicuous.

We drove into the city via Spandau. The officer and the sergeant accompanied me to the courier department, where I handed in my bags. The contents were checked according to the list and receipted. I immediately put the receipt in a prepared envelope and posted it. While I was completing the formalities, the first lieutenant made a phone call. When he hung up, he turned to me:

"Please come with me. I've been asked to take you to one of the officers in Department Ic."

A retired major received me and handed me an envelope with various papers.

"To make a long story short, Mr. R, you drive out to Staaken immediately and report to Lieutenant Colonel Leitweg in person. If he is

not there, wait for his return in any case. Please keep contact with third parties to a minimum. Break a leg! Do your job well."

He pressed a button on the desk and a first lieutenant answered.

"Mr. K., take Mr. P. out to Staaken, he has to report to Lieutenant Colonel Leitweg there."

The lieutenant made a gesture of honor and I bowed briefly. Once again I walked down the endless corridors of this mammoth building and several paternoster elevators to the courtyard, where another driver was waiting for us.

As fond as I was of the Berliners themselves, I never felt at home here. While Vienna was something like a second home, Berlin as a city always remained foreign to me. This had already been the case during the Olympics, remained so during my time at war school and probably didn't change this time either. For me, the capital had remained something like a distant princely seat - the staff building of a regiment - which you only entered when you were called upon. Even now, in the second year of the war, there was a hectic hustle and bustle here, as if we were all living in the deepest peace. We drove through Tiergarten and along Charlottenburger Chaussee towards Spandau and on towards Staaken. I was dead tired, the flight of many hours was making itself felt. I wanted nothing more than to sleep.

The first lieutenant dropped me off in front of one of the buildings, which were scattered in the middle of a pine forest, and announced himself in the anteroom. After a few minutes I was standing in front of the lieutenant colonel, who could not deny his East Prussian origins. He was a real "trouper". His cheerful face suggested that wine, women and song had never been alien to him.

"Lieutenant Colonel, I report to the post as ordered!"

"I would like to welcome you."

This officer also looked at me so scrutinizingly, as if I had "stolen silver spoons".

"So that's you," he added thoughtfully.

The papers he had brought with him lay in front of him.

"Shouldn't you be a lieutenant by now?"

"I do not wish to comment on this, Lieutenant Colonel."

"All right, you'll know best how the hare runs. We don't have much time. You'll be receiving special aviation clothing today. Have you had any

health problems recently? When was the last time you were checked for fitness for altitude?"

"April 1940, Berlin Air Force Investigation Center."

"That's excellent, they'll still have your documents there. I'll have you registered immediately, you can do it tomorrow morning. I'm sure you'll be ready by midday. Are you an aerial photography expert?"

"Yes, sir, lieutenant colonel!"

"Have you flown aerial maps?"

"Not only have I flown, Lieutenant Colonel, I have repeatedly carried out all the work, from the fixed point survey to the rectification work and the production of the plan itself."

"Good, then you know all about it. Your papers say something about pilot training?"

"I had to drop out of my pilot training twice for health reasons, and I still need two more training stages to get my Air Force pilot's license, maybe 20 flying hours in total."

"Well, then you've already come a long way. Which aircraft have you flown so far?"

"The FW 44 'Stieglitz', the He 72 'Kadett', the Arado66 and the Go 145."

"That's quite a lot. If you are ready by midday tomorrow, you can be instructed in our special aerial photography equipment in the afternoon. The day after tomorrow, you could then be briefed on flying. The OvD will arrange for you to be taken to your accommodation."

How pleasantly this man stood out from so many superiors I had experienced during my time in the service. You could feel his care for his subordinates in every word he said. Nothing was overlooked. He was also a comrade in the truest sense of the word.

How many officers were there who actually fulfilled Article 4 of the "Duties of the German Soldier", which reads:

"Soldierly leadership is based on a sense of responsibility, superior skill and tireless care."

Words that were so deeply rooted in the essence of soldiering, that filled the task of the superior with life. But they were also words that directly demanded the human being, the person who cannot and must not be superior to his equals: the mere superior. First among many. Did that make him something special, a better person perhaps? No, as a rule he could not be, simply because he did not owe his task to the will of the community

from which he emerged. That is what makes him so different from the tribes and hordes of human antiquity. I experienced officers who tackled their soldiers shirt-sleeved, when often the hardest work had to be done. There were also others who stood by with bare boots and avoided getting their gloved hands dirty. "Gentleman", perhaps, but never role models for their soldiers. They set themselves apart from the community, which could only live through comradeship. They broke the bond that bound them to the military community. But anyone who severs the bond of comradeship, I believe, severs the bonds of military order. He no longer turns the troop leader into a superior, but into a "superiorized". Once this bond between superiors and subordinates has been severed, then the Comradeship; just as every community dies when the bond between the generations is severed. How can an army be full of life if the externals of rank become an end in themselves? Such an army will not be able to stand its test. Just as a nation collapses when the generations do not go their way together, but side by side. The first storm will sweep away such an army like a heap of empty litter.

Words must go unheard if they are not spoken to the soul of man, if they do not reflect the essence of things. That is why no rule can replace the precious good that the armies of the dead gave us generations before as their experience, as their warning, as our tradition.

No rule can exist whose orders and instructions prove to be empty and unfulfillable in the face of the essence of military tradition. The real wisdom of life lies in the experiences of the ancients, in the things that have been handed down, not in the seemingly clever-sounding words of the young know-it-all.

The UvD accompanied me to a flat building between the resinous thorny pines. A beautiful air base. I could have felt at home here. You didn't have the impression of living in a barracks.

A few young officers and civilians were standing on the stairs to the entrance of the house, probably exchanging the latest jokes. I was about to hurry up the steps behind the UvD, when I heard a joyful shout behind me:

"Schorsch, old buddy, is it you or isn't it you?"

I turned on my heel. Helmut Witte was standing in front of me. My friend and comrade from my happy days in Vienna. That was a real surprise. There was no stopping us, we hugged like only friends can.

"What are you doing here? Are you joining our bunch?"

"You ask in vain. I don't know what I'm doing here. I don't even know what you are."

"Do you really act that stupid, or are you actually that clueless? You're an old aerial photography bunny. Then you've come to the right place. Come on, bring your stuff to the booth and we'll go for a lift."

That too, I had already seen myself in the "trap".

"You, I still have to receive some special flying clothes. Come with me and accompany me. Wait a moment."

I rushed up the stairs. The UvD showed me to my room and handed me the key. On the way to the clothing room, we exchanged old memories. After I had taken care of my things, it was a long evening. I listened attentively to his experiences from almost one hundred long-range reconnaissance flights, more than half of them over Great Britain. No wonder such experiences shaped a person. How I envied him for that. What this man had already seen of the world! For years he had roamed the Dutch colonies. He knew the great Sunda Islands like the back of his hand. A wild and lovable comrade, whom many had been somewhat distant towards, but whom I had taken to my heart from day one. It didn't bother me that he was an old "foreign legionnaire", on the contrary. Adventure knows no written rules, it is the fulfillment of an unruly longing. Helmut had fulfilled this dream of youth, and I envied him for it.

The following day began with noticeable restlessness. I had just had time to eat breakfast when the driver picked me up. I ran for my medical papers and jumped into the bucket truck, where two comrades in civilian clothes were already sitting. How I hated these medical examinations. I had reason enough for this. Somehow you were at the mercy of the doctors, and yet it was these almost mechanical examinations for fitness to fly that impressed me. Perhaps it was because I was looking for a certain self-affirmation.

I handed over my papers at the reception desk and the "mill" immediately started turning: Ophthalmologist, no problem, I had excellent eyesight. Ear, nose and throat doctor, a bit more worrying. I'd had a lot to do with colds and coughs in the past few weeks. Internist, since my diphtheria I had to be careful here; they didn't always agree with my heart sounds. Then that too was over and we went to the pressure chamber.

The apparatus was very similar to a submarine, and I had a particular aversion to submarines ever since a training trip in the Kiel Fjord.

We were locked in with a doctor. Slowly the pumps began to work. I watched the instruments: 1000 m, 2000 m, 3000 m, 4000 m.

"Put on your masks," the doctor shouted.

My counterpart, a young non-commissioned officer, broke out in a sweat. The rapid drop in pressure must have been a considerable strain for a "lowland Tyrolean". The doctor stopped and examined his comrade in detail. His stethoscope moved over his chest and back, then he continued. The needle now rose more slowly: 4500 m, 5000 m, 5500 m, 6000 m. Again, the doctor listened to everyone's heartbeat and asked how they were feeling. I felt extremely well.

7000 m, 8000 m, nobody showed any signs of illness. The needle stopped for a few minutes, then it moved back again and stopped at 6000 m:

"Take the message pad and pencil. When I give the order to remove the mask, write down the following message:

'Plan square Anton-Friedrich, three enemy fighters, course 120°'. Have you all understood? Now take off your breathing mask. Start writing."

Everyone bent over their writing board and got started. Contrary to my usual habit, I wrote particularly carefully. After just a few moments, my counterpart began to show signs of malfunction again. He turned pale and had difficulty keeping his eyes open. The doctor quickly put his breathing mask on and increased the oxygen supply. I saw black for my comrade.

I continued writing briskly, then "ants" began to crawl up my arms and legs. My ears were ringing. I connected the breathing tube and turned on the oxygen supply. After a few breaths, I was back in control. The doctor listened to me.

"Everything's fine, you have lungs like a Tibetan Sherpa."

I looked at my writing pad in amazement, up to the 8th line the writing was still bearable, but then it went all over the place, although I seemed completely sure that I had written correctly up to the last line. I was comforted again when I compared the message blocks. Most of them had been taken down much earlier.

The next test followed. Everyone had to step up to a Flieger-MG 15 and, after taking off their breathing mask, carry out the prescribed operations: Put the magazine on, take the safety off, reload, pull the trigger, take the magazine off again. It was surprising to see how quickly some of the soldiers deteriorated under this light load and reached the limits of their capabilities. Only one first lieutenant and I got as far as the 5th attempt. When I left the machine gun stand, I felt the enormous strain on my circulation: "white mice" flew in front of my eyes.

The doctor again gave the order to "drive off". The pressure in the cabin

slowly increased. After a few minutes to get used to it, we were able to leave the pressure chamber. Now the strain of the series of experiments became fully apparent to me too, my knees began to tremble. Sweat was running down my forehead. A medic took me to the ear, nose and throat doctor again. I seemed to have survived everything without any damage. Quicker than expected, I received the envelope marked "medical matter" and rushed out into the fresh air.

On my return, I immediately handed the documents to the flight surgeon, a young staff doctor who was an airplane pilot himself. He opened the envelope.

"That's an excellent result. You are fully fit for altitude. I'll call the commander immediately."

It was only at lunch that I realized how much the examination had taken out of me.

It is a wonder that there were not more failures and difficulties during these investigations.

A sergeant picked me up in the early afternoon. He had orders to instruct me on various imaging devices. When he realized that there wasn't much more to brief me on, he limited his explanations to those things that were completely new or differed from conventional imaging devices. It was the first time that I had been given the inline reconnaissance device, which is rarely found in the reconnaissance squadrons, but I immediately sensed that there was considerable tension between those present, which seemed to be mainly discharged in the discussion about the future path of the legion. The majority spoke out in favor of a tougher stance towards Antonescu, while the host repeatedly tried to calm the waves and conduct the debate with objective arguments. As the professor was lecturing, I understood almost every word. He explained the global political situation and talked about Romania's domestic political situation. In his opinion, the Legion should not do anything that could jeopardize Romania's hard-won domestic political stability. He seemed to be speaking into deaf ears.

As we said goodbye, I also realized how deeply disappointed the host was at the failure of his efforts. As he had also conducted part of the discussion in German, I thought I could dare to cheer him up a little. He fought back with a pained smile:

"Soon the water of the Dumbovita will be red, young friend!"

Early in the morning of January 21, 1941, I had to go to the Jewish hospital Elias, which had been made available to the German training troops as a military hospital, for dental treatment. No sooner had I left the hospital than I heard rifle fire, interspersed with the bursts of machine-gun fire. Wherever you looked, the military and gendarmerie were marching. In other parts of the city, we came across heavily armed squads of legionnaires waving at us.

Had Horia Sima struck out? One call was enough, it was different. The army chose to fight, the legion struck back hard.

"All members of the Wehrmacht are to go to their duty stations immediately!" Orders came thick and fast.

The doctor leaning over me was not shaken by this.

"Take it easy," he said, "we'll finish your teeth first!" I didn't take the unrest tragically either, even though my thoughts were constantly with my friends; I was also worried about Jutta. She lived with her parents in an area that often experienced uncontrolled assaults. Mobs of all shades allowed themselves dangerous raids and looting under the guise of legionary police measures. The previous day, a German major had been murdered.

After barely 15 minutes, I was also able to leave the dental ward. A vehicle from the Lw mission was parked outside the hospital to collect the remaining patients. I thought about it for a moment and decided to explore the situation in the city first. Maybe I could get in touch with my friends to find out more about the development of the conflict. I turned into a small side street and headed towards Piata Victorie. The streets were empty. Streetcars and buses had been abandoned by their drivers. A few people scurried shyly along the walls here and there, anxiously seeking shelter in the nearest houses. The thunder of guns and the rattle of machine guns gave an idea of the fierceness of the conflict. Blood flowed into the Dumbovita. A bus overtook me. I waved. The driver stopped and let me in. They didn't charge me, why should they! Just before the Piata Victorie, we were stopped by heavily armed legionnaires. They asked us to get out of the car. There was no point in driving on, as the fighting was concentrated around the square and the nearby gendarmerie barracks.

The Romanian passengers ran off in all directions. The driver left the bus as it was. Despite the legionnaires' warnings, I myself tried to get through to Piata Victorie. I carefully stalked along the hedges and garden walls. My eyes wandered from window to window. Here and there I saw fearful faces

behind raised curtains. I reloaded my pistol and put the safety on in my pocket so that I could defend myself immediately if I was shot at. The rifle and machine gun fire came menacingly close. Immediately at the junction of the road and the square, roughly opposite the Romanian Foreign Office, four gendarmes were in position with a light machine gun. A sandbag barricade offered them little protection. The machine gunner kept sending short bursts of fire to the houses on the other side of the square, which were occupied by legionnaires. Behind a low garden wall lay half a dozen gendarmes with rifles and submachine guns. A sergeant watched the windows and gardens with binoculars.

RB100/30. A device with an extraordinarily long focal length. The device with the longest focal length was normally the RB 75/30. The suspension of these long focal length devices was extremely complicated in order to avoid natural vibrations during shooting. I had already experienced convergent cameras in the Hansa Luftbild GmbH picture airplanes, as they were used almost exclusively for the production of aerial maps. Here I experienced a completely new design. A mixed construction of four convergently arranged RB 20/30 series cameras, which were arranged in a circle on a ring. The advantage of such a device system was obvious. The stereoscopic measuring accuracy was incomparably increased compared to a vertical image. In addition, the usable working surface or model surface was almost three times as large as with purely vertical images. Whereas a basic ratio of 1:3 was used for purely vertical shots, a ratio of 2:3 was achieved with this camera arrangement. This not only meant a considerable saving in work, but also an enormous saving in time: a strip of terrain that would otherwise have had to be flown over several times only had to be photographed once. At high altitudes, the area of terrain covered in one shot reached almost unimaginable dimensions, as the angle of inclination of the converging cameras was around 30°. Undoubtedly an impressive construction, an aerotopographic marvel that I had previously only known from the literature, with a similar construction by the American company "Fairchild".

We reported back to the commander.

"Briefing on the imaging equipment completed, Lieutenant Colonel."

"Thank you, that was quick, come to my room."

He stepped behind his desk and put on an "official face".

"In accordance with your orders, I must instruct you that everything you learn from now on is subject to the highest level of secrecy and has been classified as 'Secret Command Material'⁽⁴⁾. You may not speak to anyone

about the orders given. A deliberate or negligent breach of these orders will be punished in accordance with the penal provisions of the Criminal Code as treason. Read this information sheet carefully and sign it."

Somewhat confused, I sat down at my desk and read through the order again. Well, such instructions were nothing new to me; this was not the first time I had been involved in dealing with matters of a high level of secrecy. Each time, I worried whether I would be able to fulfill all the requirements of such an order conscientiously. I had already had to learn the hard way once in this respect.

"So that's done. Tomorrow and - if there's time - the day after tomorrow, you'll be doing some familiarization flights. How are you doing with the radio?"

"Lean, Lieutenant Colonel, sixty to eighty letters and the most important Q groups, that's all."

"Have you ever carried out a 'self-healing'?"

"No, but mathematically that's not a problem. I would just have to be trained in the device."

"Do that, and do it first thing in the morning."

A quick handshake and I said goodbye. I looked for Helmut in the accommodation, but everything seemed deserted. There was also a yawning emptiness in the officers' mess. So I had no choice but to retreat back to my pad with some instructions.

Next to me, the light from the bedside lamp cast a small, bright circle on the bedspread, plunging the rest of the room into dim uncertainty. I put the papers aside and began to think about everything that had passed me by in the past week.

Of course, I had always experienced the war from the sidelines, but who could exclude themselves from this huge event? Thinking about peace here in Berlin could only mean putting on the blinkers of apathy, and that didn't suit me. For me, there was war here too, a war that was not waged by generals, tanks and infantry battalions; it was a war that, like a panther, could pounce on people from the thicket of the treetops. People who only know how to tell of the predator's ravenous excitement. They have long since lost their natural sense of its menacing proximity.

The comforts of civilization took the people of Mauritius Island to a British celebrity concentration camp. If you had already had the opportunity to study politics more closely, you would have noticed that the Americans always strive for a moral motivation in their great power policy:

even in the slaughter of several million Indians; the British always act according to the principle: 'Right or wrong, my country!' Incidentally, all other peoples are nothing more than people of color who have to work for the British, whether German or French. The Russians have always been looking for a socialist cover since 1921, even though they are basically doing nothing different than Catherine the Great did in the 18th century. They are making working people all over the world stupid. The only halfway honest ones are the French: liberty, equality, fraternity! But what do they get out of it? Basically, they are just as poor as we are and always end up footing the bill!"

Dr. Barth interrupted him here:

"We will talk about these problems often. He already knows about developments in Yugoslavia. But it's good that Sommer has described it to you from his point of view. I don't think any differently. In Berlin, the beginning of this development was recognized too late. Only one person could have changed that: Dr. Neubacher instead of Ribbentrop. However, I must agree with you on one point, namely the impression, indeed the certainty, that the Wehrmacht leadership considerably underestimated the strength of the Red Army. Personally, I cannot help feeling that this was even encouraged by certain men. For example, we have been told by a confidant, and this has been verified several times, that a certain Soviet tank factory is churning out about 25 heavy tanks a day. In the meantime, however, three such plants have already been identified. One could tear one's hair out if the Chief of the General Staff were to put a question mark over this statement and send it back for re-examination without informing the Führer.

I'm only telling you all this because I know that you are to be trained for a later assignment abroad, and you can't know enough."

In the meantime, we had reached the office again. Colonel Wagner had ordered a meeting. Dr. Barth reported briefly on the new findings that had emerged from the meeting. He mentioned in particular that the analysis of Romanian aerial photographs had provided proof that the new T 34 tank was already being delivered to the troops.

The spring sky over Bucharest was a deep blue. It was a glorious evening that made us forget that there were storm clouds looming somewhere in the distance. Countless charming, dark-haired Romanian women and girls strolled along Boulevard Bratianu. A beautiful bouquet of colorful, excitingly fragrant flowers. There was no thought of war in this "Paris of

the East". Even in the second year of the war, the stores were still full and there was no shortage of the necessities of everyday life in the big city. Elegant women and men dressed in the latest Parisian fashions, alongside the colorful costumes of the Romanian rural population, colorfully embroidered dresses and blouses.

The green shirts of the legionnaires had disappeared, the colorful uniforms of the Romanian army had multiplied, surpassed only by the splendor of the gypsy women's flower baskets. How soon will this colorfulness have to give way to the monotony of the field uniforms, how many of these flowers will lie withered in the dust?

At home, one was often inclined to take friends to the tower of a church to show them the city, the beauty of the landscape. Here it was different, here you had to let yourself drift in the stream of people, you had to throw yourself into the flood of life in order to experience it. For us Germans, it was a foreign faraway place, you couldn't just look at it, you simply had to entrust yourself to the tingling variety of feelings that this city aroused. Its licentiousness seemed to me more a reflection of helpless fear. Wasn't this licentiousness a renunciation of the shaping of one's own self? Life had a façade, the template of a somehow dreamed-of, supposedly cosmopolitan ideal of the West, and yet behind this façade pulsed so much of its own, endearing naturalness. How different this city was from the country that gave birth to it. On the one hand, the glistening glitter of copied foreignness, on the other, the soothing, hospitable warmth of rural people; on the one hand, the appearance of civilized wickedness, on the other, the signs of the cultural diversity of the streams of peoples that have been active for thousands of years.

How strange, too, the juxtaposition of uniforms of otherwise already highly hostile soldiers: here the Highlanders of the British military mission, who appeared to be watching the promenading German soldiers in front of their legation in a highly disinterested and arrogant manner, there a small group of US Marines, who tried with exaggerated snappiness to give the "Krauts" a foretaste of what awaited them if they wanted to mess with them. But also the red stars on the caps of Soviet soldiers here and there, who acted as if their presence here was a matter of course. Incidentally, the proud, self-confident attitude of their officers was unsurpassed.

We joined the restless back and forth of this beehive and strolled down the boulevard like countless others. At the Hotel Ambassador, I just managed to resist saying hello to an old acquaintance from the army mission. At the corner of Boulevard Brateanu-Elisabeta near the university,

a myriad of young intellectuals were apparently discussing the latest political developments in small groups. We crossed the Elisabeta and plunged into the beer-soaked atmosphere of the "Carul cu bere", a restaurant whose wood paneling was somehow reminiscent of German pubs. Jokes flew back and forth. Many German soldiers in uniform, but also numerous Romanian soldiers, enlivened the scene. After a small evening meal, we walked down Elisabeta to the home of the German colony. There wasn't much going on there that evening. It was too nice outside, and who likes to sit in smoke-filled rooms? We walked back along Parcul Cismigiu to Calea Victoriei, stopping at the Circul Militär, the Romanian army's city casino, to watch the elegant Bucharest world swaying up and down in front of us, giving the impression that it had no interest in what was going on outside the last mud huts of its city.

A city full of contrasts, which could only arise from the ethnic diversity of its inhabitants. All around us, elegant stores, modern buildings next to the houses of the rich boyars from the turn of the century, outside in the outskirts the countless small houses of those who did not belong to the "creme de la creme". Nowhere else was the gap between these and those as clear as here, with the possible exception of the London slums. A shudder must have seized anyone who had the courage to roam Herestrau, at night - so I was told - not even the police dare. And yet, even the poorest gypsy dressed in rags didn't seem unhappy about his fate, he took life as it was offered to him. Envy seemed to be unknown.

For us, these were happy hours on a peaceful island in the middle of a wildly roaring sea. These hours were meant to be ours, we wanted to live, we wanted to dance, and it didn't seem to be a "dance on the volcano" yet.

Somehow we found ourselves in the "Colorado Bar", a meeting place for Anglo-American spies and their confidants, as I knew. That seemed to be what attracted us. It was certainly also one of the meeting places of the western-oriented demimonde, who indulged in the dream of an unknown faraway place.

We were given a table near the glass parquet floor, where artists from all over the world showed off their skills in colorful succession: English roller skaters, a French magician, Moroccan acrobats, Italian balance artists, whirling Cossacks, colored dancers. How confusing the nameless confusion of this cosmopolitan bar, a foreign body like many other things. You could certainly experience it all here in San Francisco.

Well-bodied fatties next to pale, pale demons, hollow, lanky young men next to women full of sensual beauty, ageing men accompanied by the dead

grimaces of a lost youth who flaunted their love wages from long ago in large diamonds and endless strings of pearls, well-groomed ladies but also a real high society. A colorful mixture indeed.

The dancers floated like tropical birds over the sparkling glass, their movements supple, their steps springy. Their wild rhythm seemed to paint a picture of complete abandon. They whipped up the senses, captivating everyone, whether man or woman. No sooner had one grasped the image of their beauty and thought they could immortalize it in bronze than they broke away from the viewer in a fiery whirl. The eyes wandered restlessly from the velvety darkness of the skin to the mirror-like reflections of the floor. How this strange femininity enticed us. Then a furious finale, the twitching bodies froze, only in the heavy lifting and lowering of the full breasts was life still recognizable.

Frenetic applause, excited senses alongside feigned nonchalance. A reflection of temperaments. The end!

I cautiously entered my hosts' house so as not to disturb anyone. I hurried up the stairs in my stockings and carefully opened the door to my room. There was something white and colorless on the table. A letter. From whom? I opened it and had to sit down.

"Report to the company tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. at the latest. Small luggage for approx. 1 week."

Yet another dream seemed to be coming to an end.

My hostess was visibly disappointed when I told her at breakfast that I had to go away for a few days. My bride took it in her stride:

"Take care, come back soon! Take care of yourself. Break a leg!"

A glance at the clock, it was high time. I dashed down the stairs like the famous "greased lightning", skipping four steps at once. Many had already predicted that I would inevitably break my neck. I was about to head for the meeting point at the Piața Romana when I saw an elegant, black '39 Opel Kapitän parked outside the door. The driver waved to me, it was Mr. Sommer.

"Come on, come in, I've been waiting five minutes."

"Good morning, are you going to the office?"

"Why do you think I'm standing here, you wise guy? Hurry up, we don't have much time. There's still a lot to talk about."

Somehow his behavior was typical, his face and his words spoke of such a pleasant openness that mistrust could not even arise. The fact that he was on first-name terms with me seemed almost natural to me, but I would

never have dared to reciprocate this confidentiality.

"Do you know what's going on? Why the sudden rush?"

"I was just about to tell you that. You have to go to Berlin immediately. I don't know why. You're receiving courier goods. A courier plane from Sofia is coming to Baneasa at about 9.30 a.m. It's flying to Vienna-Aspern. It is possible that the same plane will fly on to Berlin. If this is not the case, the courier office in Vienna will let you know when you can fly on. You will probably land in Gatow. You will be given a password. You will hand over the courier bag in person at the RLM courier office. You got it, in person! The bag has a strap on the wrist. Under no circumstances will you give it to anyone else for safekeeping, no matter what instructions you receive. In Berlin you will receive further orders ... Got it!"

"Understood, Mr. Sommer. It won't be that exciting!"

"Make no mistake, young man. You still have a lot to learn. By the way, at the meeting last night, I heard that another department is very interested in you. So it can't be as bad as you think. Everything will be all right again."

At the office, I took a courier bag, signed in and signed out immediately. Mr. Sommer also accompanied me to the airfield. Unfortunately, I couldn't sign out with Dr. Barth, he had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Leaning far back into the upholstery of the car, I let the many faces of this city pass me by. And there were many faces. There was the lively, sleepy face of a cheap whore, here the haggard features of a starving old woman, over there the restlessly wandering eyes of a colorfully dressed young gypsy woman.

One image after another passed by, one image erased the other. In such minutes I forgot the presence of the war, didn't give a damn about the service, became a small, searching person. I tried to see and hear, because in this city I had learned to look people in the eye, had learned to hear the meaning of their words without having leafed through the dictionary of their language much.

The driver braked in front of a high gate at Baneasa airport. A Romanian police officer checked the driver's papers and let us pass. We stopped at a small hangar on the northern edge of the airfield. We were able to stretch our legs until the plane arrived. I could feel how little I had slept the previous night.

The abrupt transition from winter to summer, which for Romania, had transformed the landscape overnight. Lush green sprouted

from the ground as far as the eye could see. Where just a few days ago the lifeless drought of late winter had prevailed, after a barely perceptible spring, the blossoming early summer had taken over. The heavy smell of fertile soil was carried over from the Baragan. I deeply inhaled the spicy air of a land that had become my second home.

A low humming noise caught our attention. Sommer held his hand over his eyes.

"This could be your plane."

From the southeast, we heard the increasingly loud sound of a small, fast airplane. Then I spotted it too.

"It's an Me 108, could it be that one?"

"It's possible, there are always others. Get your suitcase, because they certainly don't take a long break here."

When I got to the car, the driver was waiting with my small suitcase. I said goodbye with a quick handshake.

"Yesterday I drove Dr. Henrici. I used to be his driver. He saw you with Dr. Barth when they came to the office. He asked me to send you my regards from time to time. I hereby do so."

Everyone in this "club" obviously knew everyone else.

"Thank you very much, but for God's sake, don't reveal any state secrets. Nobody should actually know that."

The driver laughed.

"I'm not 'nobody', I'm just a driver."

It was good to know that I could rely on this man.

Swerving wide, the small blue bird hovered into the airfield from the west and touched down softly after a few meters. A short roar of the engine and it taxied straight towards us.

"Well, take care and keep your chin up. Hopefully they can leave you alone for a few days," laughed Sommer. The pilot brought the plane to a halt in front of us. The boarding flaps were opened and braced. Only now did we see that a second passenger had taken a seat in one of the back seats in addition to the courier we had announced. Mr. Sommer whistled softly through his teeth.

"Well, well, well, Dr. Geminus himself. The air is thick! Does the pilot have to try to get the admiral back on course?"

He turned to me:

"Be careful, a friend of the big boss. Dr. Barth and he can't smell each

other. Don't let yourself be baited. The man has shady connections from the Vatican to Moscow. Incidentally, also with the Ehrhardt Brigade and the Consul Organization, which were involved in Rathenau's assassination."

The next moment, Sommer put on the friendliest face in the world again. Dr. Geminus had got out and greeted him like an old friend.

"How are you, dear summer? How is our beloved Bucharest? Are you flying to Berlin with us?"

The formal, feigned nature of these polite phrases was clearly noticeable. Despite Mr. Sommer's practiced smile, the icy rejection he felt towards this man was clearly noticeable.

"Good afternoon, doctor. If Mr. Vachenauer had known, he would have come out, of course. Nevertheless, I would like to welcome you to Bucharest. I myself will not be flying with you. But I would like to introduce you to Mr. P., who will be the courier this time."

Cold, scrutinizing eyes turned to me.

"Pleased to meet you. I've already heard that a new young gentleman has arrived."

A fuel truck had pulled up next to the plane and they refueled. A few minutes later, the pilot returned from flight control and reported to Dr. Geminus that the plane was ready for take-off.

"Some disturbances are approaching from the southwest. I will immediately set course for Transylvania. Fair weather cumuli are reported in the Hungarian lowlands."

Dr. Geminus thanked me. I signed out to Mr. Sommer.

"Where can I sit?"

"Stay up front with me," said the pilot.

Dr. Geminus and the courier I didn't know took a seat in the back. We closed the hatches and fastened our seatbelts.

The pilot raised his right hand. A mechanic pulled away the brake pads, then we taxied for take-off. Slowly he pushed the throttle forward and after a few hundred meters this wonderful little cruising plane took off. In a gentle climb, the pilot pulled the plane onto a north-westerly course.

Despite the early morning hour, the air was crystal clear. A few mountains of cloud towered far above the western horizon. The more we gained altitude, the clearer the peaks of the Transylvanian Alps became to the north. The sun refracted in the icy cap of the Negoii as if in a thousand mirrors. After a few minutes, the first drilling rigs and the refineries of Ploesti appeared half right below me. The flares of the probes shone as far

as the eye could see, an ideal auxiliary target for approaching bombers. With a single, well-prepared and executed large-scale attack, Romania's oil production could be paralyzed for months.

A few years later, on 1.8.43, this vision was to become an infernal reality. Two Liberator units of the US Air Force attacked the refineries at low altitude. The losses were disproportionate to the success. Of around 120 bombers that approached, barely 30 made it back to their home airfield in Libya. The US agents had failed. Within a few weeks, the heavy flak had been reinforced by numerous sections of light flak, which gave the bombers a nasty reception.

While I was still contemplating the execution of such a mission, my thoughts rushed back a year to the air war school. My air tactics instructor was Major Eberhard, a very decent and basically likeable superior officer, whom I already knew from a posting with the reconnaissance squadron in Vöslau. He was an artistic, deeply religious man for whom an officer's skirt did not fit at all.

Major Eberhard had also only been at the war college for a short time and was probably not yet sufficiently familiar with the air tactics tasks set there. I sensed this during the discussion of one of the tasks.

The target was a refinery at one of the canal ports. A group of Do17E fast bombers were available for the attack. A fighter group - equipped with Me 109 Es - was to provide escort protection. Two squadrons of fighters and several batteries of heavy and light anti-aircraft guns were deployed to defend the target. Distance base-target 320 km. Distance fighter base-target 270 km.

Presumably because Major Eberhard was the only person in the lecture hall who knew my name straight away, he asked me to draw up and present a proposal for a solution.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't get any results. Major E. was getting nervous, I was taking him too long. After a while, I approached the map with my notes and explained my thoughts.

A low-level attack was only promising if the light anti-aircraft guns could be held down on target. Me109 destroyers were not available. The escort fighters could not take over because their penetration depth was insufficient. Only the SC 50 could be used in the deep attack, as the attackers endangered themselves with the short delay time when SC 250

bombs were used. The loading capacity of the Do17E version was also too low for these bombs. The pure flight time of the Me109E was 50 minutes, with a combat speed of approx. 460 km/h. The penetration depth of the fighters was limited to 210 km. If one subtracted the time for climb and possible enemy contact from the pure flight time, just under 160 km remained. This meant that the fighters had to abort their escort mission at the latest 80 km before the target. The light bombers were thus left to their own devices. The mission could not be carried out as planned. The attack was only to be carried out in high attack. I suggested the He 111 aircraft type, which could carry eight SC 250 bombs and thus achieve an incomparably greater effect. Assembly altitude over own territory approx. 6000 m. Attack altitude about 5000 m. If the solution would only allow the Do 17 E, only a gliding attack would be possible in order to play off the high speed of the Do 17 against the lower climbing ability of the enemy Hurricane fighters.

Major Eberhard became angry:

"My predecessors must have had something in mind when they set the task. Does anyone know another solution?"

Oberfeldwebel O., a fighter pilot with extensive front-line experience, came forward:

"Major, P. is absolutely right. I am also convinced that the mission cannot be accomplished in this way. We have no fighter aircraft that can provide sufficient protection for bombers at this range. The Me109 is purely a homeland defense fighter. Even if the Me 110 were made available, I would have reservations, because it is inferior to the Hurricane in air combat. At best, a combined deployment would be an option. Unfortunately, we don't have a heavy, long-range fighter. Although Heinkel is developing one, the He 219, the Technical Office has not yet approved this aircraft. The far superior Arado 240 is still in the testing stage, and it is questionable whether it will make it into the troops. I am also convinced that the Do17E should be replaced by the He 111. The fighters can then pick up the bombers on the return flight."

I spoke up again:

"Major, there is another problem. Please note how widely dispersed the plant is. The refinery covers an area of almost 2 square kilometers. So the question is, which has priority: the twelve fuel tanks or the actual refinery? I have a table of the effects of our bombs from my time as an evaluator, and the results are meagre. I therefore suggest only attacking the very sensitive refinery, because the probability of being hit there is much higher

and a greater long-term effect can be expected than with an attack on the tanks."

Eberhard became indignant:

"No further discussion on this subject. Leave such considerations to the experience of front-line officers from the last world war, who, thank God, understand more than you do, gentlemen."

The following day I was ordered to see the commander of the school, Colonel S.. He pointed out to me quite sharply that I was not there to develop "grand strategies", but to prove my ability to be an officer. I was deeply affected. My trust in Major Eberhard was severely damaged.

My comrades comforted me in a touching way:

"Man of God, who will despair? In the future, do what is asked and you will make your way."

A few days later, I met Major Eberhard on the farm. He didn't seem very happy about the matter himself, as he had awarded me an officer's commission.

"P., we discussed the solution again with the tactics teachers. You're partly right, we know that, but there's no point in swimming against the tide. The war will be over in a few months, so there's no need to introduce any major innovations in air armament."

These months had now turned into a year, and there was still no end to the war in sight. On the contrary, the war had not yet reached its climax. The Battle of Britain, fought with such great commitment, had been abandoned. The losses of our bomber units were catastrophic. The new Spitfire was giving our fighters a hard time. The Luftwaffe felt inadequately prepared. The situation became increasingly serious.

In many conversations one heard ugly accusations against Göring. Some accused him of total incompetence and complained that he was concerned with all sorts of things, but not with the actual air war. He simply let things drift, and that was bound to end in a catastrophe in air warfare. Well, I had learned to withdraw into my "snail shell".

The increasingly frequent realization that many superiors were not prepared to contribute to changing things that were recognized as worthy of change in a sober and objective assessment often paralyzed my will to work in a way that frightened me. Nevertheless, I was always ready and determined to express my opinion when I thought it was the right thing to do. The fact that this didn't always work to my advantage simply seemed

secondary to me.

Raised by my father to be obedient, I had learned in the youth movement to join in with joy and enthusiasm where comradeship and community life demanded it. However, it seemed unbearable to me to accept developments that I had recognized as wrong and that I rejected out of deep conviction.

It happened more and more frequently that I clashed with superiors, even with comrades, because of the opinions I expressed, who had no understanding for this out of misunderstood loyalty to orders, perhaps also opportunism, and were not prepared to stand up for their convictions. Often enough I experienced that precisely those who sometimes displayed a downright disgusting cowardice, behind closed doors, in a hypocritical manner, made unobjective criticism and pushed through measures and orders that they could have contributed to changing beforehand. Again and again I heard: "Leave it alone, we can't change anything, so get over it."

Well, an order was also something that was indispensable for me. In everyday military service and in front of the enemy, there could and must be no discussion about this. Everyone, including myself, had to be prepared to obey unconditionally wherever the task at hand and the common goal demanded it. But wasn't it part of the essence of comradeship, but also part of a soldier's duty, to do everything possible to ensure that paths recognized as wrong were not taken? How often had I experienced that self-righteous behavior towards subordinates was combined with unworthy "soft-pedaling" towards superiors.

The categorical imperative of soldiering is not the command of others; it is the inner command to which we have subjected ourselves of our own free will. This is where the nature of loyalty, of obedience, differs from the nature of duty. Loyalty is the inner commitment to the community, to one's neighbor. Duty is the bond within oneself. Those who only talk about their rights do not even know what real freedom is. Only those who are prepared to do something for their own sake without being forced to do so are free. Faithful is not he who thoughtlessly carries out a given command, faithful is he who subordinates himself to the nature of human community of his own free will. Loyalty and duty do not subject us to the power of others, they lift us up into the community of free men.

The written rules of human law arise from the compulsion of demarcation in living together. Loyalty and a sense of duty are more than just written rules, they are given to us in the blood of our mothers and

fathers, they are what places us above the animal, what makes us human in the first place. The law knows command and obedience, it also knows compulsion; but loyalty and duty give us freedom, they bind us humans to family and fatherland for our own sake.

For many, the power to command seems to be a sign of tyranny and slavery. They have certainly never understood or wanted to understand the basic values of human coexistence. Only those who have borne the burden of responsibility and obedience within themselves can give orders. That is why it seems pointless to me to judge later on whether the consequences of an order should have been recognizable. At the moment of decision, God alone knows the path that must be taken.

Again and again we will have to ask ourselves the question: Where do submission and slavery begin, where do obedience and duty end? I am deeply convinced that this lies within ourselves. Only those who submit themselves in obedience are slaves. He who obeys for the sake of a duty freely assumed is free and will always remain free. No one should therefore dare to throw a stone at those who have obeyed, if they have disposed of themselves and cowardly submitted. Command and obedience are the unchanging present, to judge them later is a wasted past and a lost future. I struggle for the present, the past is experience frozen in stone.

Can you hear the non-commissioned officer shouting in deep excitement: "Get ready to jump!"

Does he know that with the next order he will bring death to many of his men, that he himself will collapse in a hail of bullets? He doesn't know, but he suspects it, and yet the order comes: "Jump up, march, march!"

They storm, roar and race, fence and shoot. Who thinks of life and death in such moments, who thinks of right and wrong? What is the meaning of all values? Only in the fact that they have the same value for everyone, that we recognize their value together. Nothing has any meaning if we throw it away and give it up. That is the meaning of all apprenticeship, that we do not carelessly put aside the multitude of experiences given to us, but always make use of them.

It is not the ideologue who shapes man, who teaches him the fullness of his rights. How pitiful would this law book, which walks on two legs, be. Nor is it formed by those who believe they can pour all people through a sieve like grains of sand. No, only those who know how to elevate people, who can lead them up the ladder of human community, which never consists or consisted of dead stone, but of life.

A scale that has been shaped by the countless human generations that have made us what we have become. It is only in the attachment to valid ethical values that mankind grows believing hope, in the effect on himself and the people around him of the same mind that the mighty melody resounds, which has arisen from the scale that has been given to us over millions of years: the song of our lives.

We had glided down from the bizarre rocky heights of the Transylvanian Alps into the Muresh Valley. Past the legendary heights of the Transylvanian Ore Mountains, we floated out into the sun-drenched Hungarian lowlands. The engine ran quietly and smoothly. A picture of profound peace, and yet the air seemed as tense as before a thunderstorm. Hungarian fighters had repeatedly appeared and disappeared next to us.

The pilot gave me a sign. He told me to put my headphones on.

"Elector 5, please come, Elector 5, please come," a ground figure called out to us, somewhat indistinct and distorted.

"This is Elector 5, I have understood, please come in," the pilot reported.

"Elector 5, this is Pußta. Pasha's order: stopover in Budapest. I repeat: Pasha's order, stopover in Budapest-Ferihegy. "

"This is Elector 5, I have understood. I'm landing in Budapest. Over."

Dr. Geminus leaned forward towards me:

"Is something special?"

"Doctor, we have orders from Pasha to land in Budapest. No further explanation."

"What are you doing? I have to be in Berlin at 3.00 pm. We can't make it with a stopover in Budapest," he said angrily.

"Report to Pasha that we are flying through to Vienna."

The pilot shrugged his shoulders helplessly. What should he do? He called the ground station again:

"Pußta of Elector 5, have orders to fly directly to Vienna."

"Elector 5, wait a moment."

After a few minutes, I received another call.

"Elector 5, from Pußta line. You are landing in Budapest-Ferihegy. This is an important command! Do you understand?"

"Pußta, I have understood. Landing as ordered."

Dr. Geminus turned angry red and seemed about to explode, but then controlled himself. Without giving me a second glance, he threw himself

back into the leather upholstery of his seat. His face worked with excitement. There was going to be a thunderstorm when we landed.

I thought of Dr. Barth, what a tremendous contrast of characters. I still didn't know what influence this man really had. I was soon to find out.

The outline of the city emerged from the gray-white haze of the Danube lowlands. Budapest was certainly one of the most beautiful cities in the world, but from a bird's eye view this impression was multiplied. The shadow of Gelert rose from the river like the castle of the Holy Grail.

We were given permission to land immediately and floated onto the landing cross with playful ease. We touched down as if on a soft down cushion and didn't even realize that we had long since touched the ground. The place seemed unoccupied. Only three airplanes were parked in front of the large, old-fashioned hangars. We taxied over to one of the hangars, in front of which a mechanic waved two red flags at us. They were working on a dark-sprayed Do 215, next to an airplane that I couldn't make sense of. As soon as we reached our parking spot, I threw off the seat belts and opened the hatch. I stood on the wing in one leap and was down on the ground. A waiter placed brake pads underneath. Only now did I recognize the type of aircraft. It was a Ju86 without national insignia. Sprayed dark gray on top, bright blue on the underside. Only the large wingspan and the newer Jumo engines

design had irritated me. It differed significantly from the old bomber version: instead of the MG stand in the bow, it had a rounded glass cockpit. The MG stands on the upper and lower sides had disappeared. Only the twin tail unit was still reminiscent of the characteristic image of this tried and tested aircraft. As I didn't think I was affected by the landing order, I wanted to take a closer look at the "mill". I tucked my messenger bag under my arm and walked over. After a few meters I attracted the displeasure of a guard I hadn't even noticed:

"Please step back immediately, otherwise I will make use of my firearm."

There was no point in getting involved in discussions. I turned around "on the back foot" and went back to our machine.

Dr. Geminus had already set off in the direction of a small building. I trotted after him.

A car with Hungarian license plates was parked in front of the building. In one of the business premises, the doctor shot at an air force officer who

was working on weather maps.

"Who gave the order to land?"

The still young captain looked at him helplessly and did not lose his cool for a moment.

"You've come to the wrong address, sir, go to the next room!"

Dr. Geminus turned away brusquely and went into the adjoining rooms. The captain spoke to me in a clearly raised voice:

"What kind of person is that? It's probably still customary for us to say 'hello' and introduce ourselves."

The doctor must have heard that. I leaned over the chart table and watched the captain at work. Even without an explanation, I knew what was going on here: the very thorough preparation of a weather observation flight.

Some time passed before the doctor returned with two gentlemen of his own age. I was almost speechless when I recognized one of them as Dr. Barth's Hungarian acquaintance from Budapest Central Station. I tried not to let it show. But far from it. The gentleman came up to me with every sign of genuine joy at seeing me again and gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"Well, young comrade, that's a surprise. We'll see each other again so soon. Welcome to Budapest!"

"I'm also pleased to see you again. How are you?"

"Come on, let's have a quick drink for that, the gentlemen are still busy anyway."

He grabbed me by the arm and steered me out of the door. When I quickly tried to sign out with Dr. Geminus, he had undergone an astonishing transformation. The angry gruffness had given way to a marked politeness.

"But of course, Mr. v. Eneky, we have one $\frac{1}{4}$ hour."

It was the first time I had heard this name. It was to stay with me for most of the war and for years afterwards. There are people who leave such a deep impression that you can't forget them. This was one of them.

Already standing under the door, Mr. v. Eneky turned to the young captain:

"We'll be in the officers' dining room if we're needed!"

"That's clear, Colonel!"

That killed two birds with one stone. I knew the name and title of my companion. Both made me uneasy, because it seemed a few floors too high for my standards. But, as so often in my life, I have always found that I am

fond of some people from the very first moment. His first words on the platform in Budapest had already won me over. Despite the outward elegance of this man, there was nothing contrived, nothing learned, there was only openness, without any reservation.

"It's better if we sit down for a while. The gentlemen have things to discuss that are nobody's business. What's the situation in Bucharest?" he continued the conversation.

"I see dark storm clouds gathering. There's a lot going on on Romania's north-eastern border, Colonel. Of course, you can feel it everywhere in Bucharest too."

"Please leave out my rank, which you just picked up. The enemy is listening!" The colonel looked at me thoughtfully, pulled up a chair and sat down.

"You see, young friend, you're not telling me anything new. I have in

"Gentlemen, our intelligence services have detected units of two tactical air armies in Bessarabia, Bukovina and the neighboring Ukrainian territories. These are at least four bomber squadrons, six fighter squadrons, four reconnaissance groups and three transport squadrons, which are mainly stationed at airfields in the Odessa, Kishinev, Chernivtsi, Balta and Vinnitsa areas ..."

The lieutenant colonel continued his presentation with lengthy explanations of the structure and operational principles of the Soviet air force, which unfortunately met with little interest from the army officers present. There was general surprise, however, when Lieutenant Colonel C. stated:

"Our airspace monitoring centers report violations of Romanian airspace several times a week. The incursions often reach the Galatz-Buzau line. Similar incidents are also reported from the Hungarian and Slovakian border areas. Soviet long-range reconnaissance aircraft fly over Romanian territory at high altitude at least once a week. Following the recommendations of the Reich government, the Romanian air force has not yet taken any countermeasures.

The following aircraft types have been recognized with certainty:

In the bomber squadrons, the four-engine Tupolev Ant 6 (TB 3), the four-engine Petlyakov Ant 42 (TB 7), now also designated Pe8, and the Tupolev Ant 40 (SB 2) as a medium bomber. Incidentally, this was a type that won the world altitude record in 1937 and presumably also carried out long-range reconnaissance over Romanian territory.

As a light bomber, the Petlyakov PB 100 (Pe 2), which is also used as a

tactical reconnaissance aircraft. Furthermore, the Ilyushin DB-3, also known as the IL-4, also known for a series of flight records. For some months now, the Ilyushin IL-2, a type designed as a combat aircraft and light bomber, has been delivered to the troops.

The Polikarpov I-16 (RATA) - known from the Spanish war - is used in the fighter units, and in some units also the I-15 and the I-153. However, numerous fighter units are currently being converted to more modern types such as the Lavochkin LaGG 1 and the Mikoyan MiG 1.

In general, I would like to state that the Soviet Air Force has a considerable numerical strength, which probably cannot be matched by the German Air Force."

When Lieutenant-Colonel C. had finished, we looked at each other with concern. I gave Dr. Barth a questioning look, which he answered with a slight shrug of his shoulders, as if to say: "Nothing new in the East."

For me, there was too much of the new.

A middle-aged gentleman in civilian clothes sitting in front of me spoke up:

"Lieutenant Colonel, can I conclude from your remarks that you are of the opinion that the German air force will not succeed in achieving air supremacy in the event of war?"

Lieutenant-Colonel C. waited for the translation and stood up again:

"Your conclusion is correct. I am well aware of the high level of training and the great combat experience of the German Air Force. But it is equally certain that the German Air Force leadership has no idea whatsoever of the extent of tactical and operational deployment in the event of a war with the USSR. I know of no operational aircraft type with which the German air force would be in a position to disrupt or even interfere with Soviet supplies in such a way that this would have consequences for the overall conduct of the war. However, I do not rule out the possibility that it will be possible to achieve air superiority for a limited period of time and space, at least in the initial phase."

This led to heated discussions among the audience. The general felt compelled to intervene:

"Gentlemen, Lieutenant Colonel Cristeanu is one of our most experienced air tacticians, he has presented his personal opinion here. I ask you to respect that. After the break, please go to your respective departments. There will then be an opportunity to ask specific questions. Thank you!"

I was impressed by the way the general stood in front of his staff officer.

That was not an everyday occurrence and showed exemplary soldierly behavior. We were seen off.

The animated conversations continued during the walk in the break. Various gentlemen had joined us. I resorted to listening, because I was not only the youngest "marcher" in terms of age. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on the fact that the war was obviously approaching a decisive climax.

Still preoccupied with what I had just heard, I didn't notice that one of Dr. Barth's acquaintances had joined me. He was perhaps in his mid-thirties. Beneath a thick shock of blond hair, friendly blue eyes laughed.

"Well, I don't think you know whether to laugh or cry yet?" he addressed me in a friendly manner. Unsure who I was looking at, I introduced myself.

"Summer," he said, "it might as well be winter!" he laughed.

"Have you been with Dr. Barth for a long time?"

"Whatever you say!" I evaded.

"You've already experienced a lot in this war, what do you think about the situation?"

"For me everything is so hopeless, Mr. Sommer, if the Soviet deployment is really directed against Germany, it will lead to a war into which the whole of Europe will be drawn. That the British don't see that? I no longer understand the world. There must at least be a way to balance things out in the West!" I turned to my interlocutor with concern.

"What do you expect from the British? Do you think Churchill is a European statesman? Far from it! For the British - or rather for those who govern this country - Europe is colonial territory, and they wage every war on the mainland as if it were a colonial war far from home. Churchill, too, lives mentally and politically in the delusion that the island is still an unassailable fortress. The demolition of "Sea Lion" may have reinforced this view," replied Mr. Sommer.

"He lacks a global strategy, but not the Soviets, and we will soon feel that. Do you think that joining forces with the Reich is essential for the British? No, sir! For Churchill, Hitler is a "nigger chief" who should be fought like one. It is best to do this without suffering great losses, so the war against him is left to other 'Negro tribes' on the continent, namely the Soviets or, even better, the corrupt tribal chiefs!"

"Are you serious?" I asked, somewhat uncomprehendingly. It was a mystery to me how you could address problems that decided the weal and woe of entire nations with a laughing face.

"You bet," he said, "you still have a lot to learn!"

"You speak like Dr. Barth," I replied thoughtfully, "but if two high-ranking officers assess the situation in this way, why is it not possible to bring such opinions to the attention of the political and military leadership?"

"Dear friend, to set the record straight, I am not an officer, although I am a friend of Dr. Barth. One day you will realize that there are also forces in our area that fight each other to the death. If our supreme leader didn't fear our circle, many of us would have already been killed. Only because he knows that the Führer is indebted to one or other of us from earlier times does he not dare to shoot us down. We have been isolated here and are being monitored by a confidant in Sofia. So be careful!" -

"But now to your question. There is no better example of British strategy than the SOE commando operation here in Romania last summer," Mr. Sommer continued thoughtfully.

"Do you mean the attempt to blow up the canal in the 'Iron Gate'?" I've heard details about it from men in the oil spill protection unit, but only details!"

"Well, then you already know a lot, because I'm convinced that not even half of those present have ever heard of the matter. If you're interested, I'll give you a brief description of what happened. It's a textbook example of British commando tactics!"

"I'm asking for it!" My curiosity was piqued.

"Since the British had withdrawn their guarantees for Romania, acts of sabotage against the oil industry and the existing means of transportation, especially the railroads and Danube shipping, had become more frequent here in the country. We very quickly identified a team of British-French sabotage experts behind these attacks. And it's not just a mind game when I suggest that those who ordered the attacks had in mind both the disruption of the Reich's supply of important raw materials and the paralysis of production in the event of a Soviet attack. The British had always regarded international law and the laws of war as little more than a pretty façade, and they hardly cared about them themselves. That's why they didn't give a damn about Romania's neutral status, just as they were completely indifferent to the diplomatic contact that still existed. Romania is also a colonial state. Right or wrong, my country*, you know.

I was in Cernavoda with other members of the department to discuss measures to protect the important railroad bridge when we received the news that the captain of a Romanian coastal boat had observed suspicious ship movements near the Snake Islands at dawn. A cargo ship sailing under

the Turkish flag had been transferred to barges. We immediately raced to Sulina in a motorboat and simultaneously alerted all the available oil spill protection forces. Barely an hour after our arrival, we observed how the tugboat with the three barges was smuggled into the canal. Of course, British agents were also working here. There was no sign of movement on the tug or the barges. The constant surveillance by trusted Danube fishermen had a surprising result the following night shortly after Braila: about a dozen men were cavorting in the dark on one of the barges, apparently doing gymnastics and exercise. We sounded the alarm, as we suspected that an action against the bridge at Cernavoda was underway, and that was just what we needed. However, the towing train passed the bridge without delay. The tension was growing. We initiated an official intervention with the Romanian government with the aim of stopping the tug and tow from continuing its journey. The Romanians initially refused, citing international law and the international Danube Convention, which supposedly made it impossible for them to intervene. However, they agreed to intervene if they succeeded in forcing the tug and tow out of the open water of the river. In a well-prepared blitz operation, in close cooperation with the Romanian water police, the tug was pushed into the port of Giurgiu and surrounded by Romanian security police and oil spill protection men. After tough negotiations and convinced of the hopelessness of the situation, the British gave up. Under civilian camouflage, half a company of excellently equipped special service men with the heaviest weapons surrendered. One of the barges contained a load of at least a hundred tons of TNT, the other was full of cement. Well, the Tommys defused the cargo themselves and went into internment. What did they intend to do? The tow train was to be smuggled into the canal in the 'Iron Gate'. After eliminating the guards and the operating personnel - some of the men were specially trained for this - the barge with the TNT was to be blown up. You can imagine the consequences: Interruption of Danube navigation for at least two years in both directions, because the actual riverbed is so criss-crossed by rocky reefs and shoals that it cannot be used for river navigation. As already mentioned, the British also wanted to kill two birds with one stone here: to spoil our supplies and the Russians' use in the event of an advance to the Balkans."

Smiling, Mr. Sommer continued his explanations: "Am I not right again? The 'savages' on the continent are racing against each other, that's the way it is and nothing else! The Tommys have only forgotten one thing, that bears are very good swimmers, the Russian bear in particular. So what will

be left of the British World Regiment? Nothing!

If the Reich loses this war, sooner or later His Majesty will become a loyal vassal of the Soviet Union, that seems as certain to me as the Amen in the Church. The only bad thing is that we are making many of the same mistakes as the British. You know, I studied in England for many years, so you know who you're dealing with!"

When I looked up thoughtfully, Dr. Barth was standing in front of me.

"So, did Sommer lecture you on colonial policy?" he laughed.

"You'll have more opportunities to talk to each other. We have to get over to the evaluation now."

Sommer said goodbye.

On the way, Dr. Barth turned to me:

"One of the best England experts we have, Sommer was just a thorn in the side of some people, so he was sent to the 'desert!'"

I was exhausted and tired. A great deal of my deep belief in a higher justice had crumbled away. While I had previously been inclined to see the many small obstacles and resistances tumbling down a slope like little stones, suddenly whole rocks came tumbling down and threatened to crush principles that I had considered to be universally valid.

Why was I disappointed with my image of man? Certainly, everyone is disappointed when an expected gift does not correspond to what they had hoped for. But was this life a gift at all, was it not a constant giving? Nothing could be perfect in this world because the human spirit is imperfect. Man is also imperfect, and therefore also that which is created by man.

Many talk about the equality of all people and find even the rungs of a ladder that enables us to climb to the heights of life unjust. They do not want to recognize that this ladder is part of the order of our lives. Only those who stand on the lowest rung can climb up. Those who have already climbed the ladder of life, to whom all success has been given, perhaps even bestowed, can only fall or die. Some will say that the very order of birth is unjust. One poor, the other rich, one weak, the other strong. Does not every weak person who fights against this supposed "injustice" of his birth only become really strong, the poor really rich? Fighting for justice and equality must therefore not mean destroying the order, the ladder, that makes it possible for us to climb to the heights of our existence. If we do that, we remain one of the many, eternally dissatisfied people who can never rise to human greatness. This constant struggle for a place on the ladder of life is what shapes people and nations. Anyone who demands that

everyone should stand on the same rung of human existence from birth is applying the standard of death to life. People are not equal because they are equal in their mere birth or death. They are only equal in the community of their family, their tribe, their people. They are equal before God and before the law given to themselves. But even the struggle for an equal place before the face of the Almighty means a struggle, a struggle with oneself, but also a constant battle of spirits.

Anyone who takes away man's striving for a higher place on the ladder of life is murdering. He deprives human life of the meaning that God has given it.

How many people might this war have already knocked off the ladder? Millions upon millions all over the world. Is war the father of all things because it constantly forces us to struggle for a better place in the imperfect order of this world?

How pathetic those who constantly look backwards, making the ifs and buts of the past the yardstick for their actions. Once things have taken their course, there is only life or death. The greatness of responsibility is revealed in the present. Those who can do nothing but judge the past are usually looking for justification for their own guilty conscience. They try to escape responsibility for the present.

Justice does not come from punishment for mistakes made. Those who do so not only kill those who have failed, they kill their people. Justice arises from the sum of painful experience, brought into the order of the present, with the will to take responsibility.

I followed Dr. Barth to one of the flat buildings. At the entrance there were strict controls again. No sooner had I found my way out of the sun and into the semi-darkness of the vestibule than Colonel Krescu stood before me:

"Don't we know each other? I noticed you during the briefing, but as hard as I try, I can't place you in my memory."

He spoke a clear Transylvanian-tinged German.

I bowed and looked again at this, God knows, unusual face, then the veil fell.

"Forgive me, Colonel, I also think I've seen you before, but I'm still not sure. Aren't you an acquaintance of Mircea D.? I have been invited there several times and I seem to remember that you were also there in the company of a lady."

Visibly surprised, he touched his forehead.

"How could I have forgotten that! Now I know who you are: 'Sfintu

Gheorghe*. A friend of Mircea's is also my friend, you must know that!" A typical Romanian attitude, as I had often encountered before. It turned out that he never forgot that.

To the surprise of the Germans present, he hooked up with me and led me to a secluded corner of the room.

"How is Jonel? Have you heard from Petru?"

"Colonel, I have no news from Petru. Jonel wrote a card from Vienna. He's trying to get through to Spain. However, an acquaintance claimed that he was in the custody of the SD."

The colonel's face showed signs of anger and concern.

"A disgrace, all legionnaires are said to have been interned in Germany. Where do you live? We absolutely have to meet! My wife and I would be delighted if you could be our guest!"

I was thunderstruck.

"Interned? I can't believe that, Colonel."

He shrugged his shoulders and gave me no more answers. He walked quickly over to some younger Romanian officers, who greeted him with respect.

Dr. Barth was still waiting for me. He looked at me scrutinizingly:

"How do you know Colonel Krescu?"

"Doctor, I was introduced to him by acquaintances."

He nodded in understanding.

"An outstanding man. Perhaps one of the best officers in the Romanian army, but an avowed opponent of the marshal. A fanatical anti-communist, so he's in the right place. I warn you again, be careful, such connections can have unpleasant consequences."

He didn't seem to believe me and obviously attached more importance to the acquaintance than it actually had.

In the meantime, we had entered one of the workrooms. A myriad of depictions of the organization of Soviet units covered the wall. Pictures of Red Army uniforms and insignia. Diagrams of small arms. In the next room, the identification board of Soviet tanks and armored vehicles. The T 26 and T 28, BT 5 and 7 already mentioned in the location; the T 70 reconnaissance tank, which was already being delivered. I was amazed by the dimensions of the KW I and KW II. Heavy tanks of a size never seen before. The KW I had 43.5 t and a KWK 7.62 cm, the KW II 52 t and a 15.2 caliber howitzer. Each of these tanks was still armed with 3 machine guns. In addition to technical drawings, there are also the latest photographs, which were obviously taken during the occupation of

Bessarabia.

I was immediately struck by the question of whether our armor-piercing weapons were sufficient to combat such colossi.

"Doctor, as far as I know, the army does not yet have a Pak larger than 3.7 cm caliber. With 8 cm frontal armor and 4-6 cm side armor, the penetrating power of this cannon is not sufficient."

"That's right! In the meantime, however, two Pak divisions have been equipped with the new 5 cm cannon, and a third will be added soon. Still not enough, of course. There's now also a shaped charge, but the man has to bring it up to the tank first."

I remembered the weapons demonstration by units of the former Austrian army, which I was able to attend in October 1938 as a spectator and companion of Major Kleinschmidt, in the vicinity of General Löhr. Under the critical eye of the Führer, firing tests were carried out on small Italian tanks and "discarded" German tanks. The results were not exactly convincing. Especially when firing at bunkers, both Pak and infantry guns did not perform particularly well. It was only when tests with the 8.8 cm anti-aircraft guns followed that the situation changed. I was standing only a few meters away from the Führer when he very firmly demanded the immediate introduction of an anti-tank gun of larger caliber and longer barrel length. A light gun developed in Austria was shown, but it met with the skepticism of the generals.

I described my experiences to Dr. Barth. Nodding his head thoughtfully, he followed my explanations. One of the gentlemen who had been listening to our conversation remarked that the 8.8 cm Flak had achieved considerable success in the French campaign in fighting tanks. Of course, I was also aware of this. Dr. Barth, however, disagreed rather indignantly:

"The use of heavy anti-aircraft guns to fight tanks must remain an emergency solution, that is not their task. This weapon is far too valuable for such a mission. Tanks can only be fought by tanks. The solution is to use heavy, fully armored Paks. Armor-piercing weapons belong in the front line of the infantry. However, heavy anti-aircraft guns only have a place there if the situation has become hopeless."

When I was confronted with this problem later in the war, I often remembered Dr. Barth's remark. He was right.

I had already noticed the numerical strength of the Soviet artillery in the organizational pictures. Now, in front of the illustrations and technical drawings of Soviet artillery, I realized the firepower that these units possessed.

I vividly remembered an instructional demonstration during my war school days at the Döberitz military training area, when the attack of a reinforced battalion with linked weapons was shown. Sure, it had been an impressive sight, but when could such a concentration of fire be achieved?

I was also amazed at the large number of tracked vehicles that the Soviet mechanized units had at their disposal. This gave these brigades considerable cross-country mobility.

The air force had taken up residence in the corridor opposite. Here, too, the picture was the same as in the army section: organizational pictures of Soviet air units. Depictions of rank and activity insignia, diagrams and technical information about aircraft, aircraft identification boards. Pictures taken at Soviet airfields. Aerial photographs of airfields in the Romanian territories occupied by the Soviets.

We were surprised at the variety of aircraft types, which certainly gave the impression that they were on a par with our own planes. I used to have a lot to do with members of the "Legion Condor". They spoke almost exclusively of the "RATA", a very maneuverable single-seat fighter aircraft. Here, however, completely different aircraft appeared: a whole series of pictures of the LaGG 1, the MIG1 and its improvement, the MIG 3, but also a myriad of models from the 1920s, including the Ant 6 (TB 3), a four-engined bomber that reminded me of our Do 11.

I almost had a mishap when I entered the picture department. One of my old comrades from the picture department of the air force command greeted me beaming with joy. I just managed to stop him, otherwise he would have revealed my real name and that would have been more than just "embarrassing". Nevertheless, we had time to exchange one or two memories. He had been sent here together with others to familiarize Romanian officers and non-commissioned officers with the German aerial photography equipment and at the same time to ensure close cooperation in the evaluation of aerial photographs.

Some excellent aerial maps of the Pruth and Dnjestr sections were available.

"Were you involved?" I turned to my comrade.

"Yes, but don't worry, the Romanians have all sorts of skills in that respect too, they don't need to learn much more from us!"

"I believe that. I just wanted to say that we've learned a lot from Kleinschmidt. I've seen few people who have achieved the professional

quality of his picture plans, don't you think?"

Dr. Barth interrupted us:

"You wouldn't expect anything else from Major Kleinschmidt, would you?"

"That's what I wanted to say, doctor!"

Oblique shots of Odessa and Sevastopol aroused our particular interest. At the front of the room, a few evaluators were working with space glasses. I leaned over one of them and recognized aerial photographs of a large railroad station, albeit on a very small scale. The photos must therefore have been taken from a great height. The station was crowded with freight trains. I asked the sergeant to give me his seat. He complied immediately.

The load of the trains became clear in the enlarged glass. Two trains with motor vehicles of all kinds. One train was loaded with heavy artillery. The pictures were really sharp and - as the long shadows showed - taken in the late afternoon. There were tanks on another train. Even though the majority of the vehicles were still covered, you could clearly see some of the tanks on the loading ramp. I took one of the tank identification boards and compared the shadows: perfect

T 28: Where might the photos have been taken? On another track, a train with covered vehicles. I searched along the shadows. It was strange that in all cases the shadow in front showed a clear elevation.

"Can I have a thread counter, please?"

I was gripped by a sense of unease that always overtook me when I went on a "voyage of discovery". I measured the length of the shadows and there was no significant difference. Again and again I searched the train for another distinguishing feature. I called out to my comrades.

"Leo, why don't you come and see me? Have you seen this footage before?" He immediately came over from the next room.

"Yes, but only in the negative. I didn't notice anything special!"

"Why don't you look through the room glass and measure the shadows?"

He shrugged his shoulders and kept comparing the images. Dr. Barth had also become curious in the meantime:

"Have you discovered anything special?"

"I'm not sure, Doctor, trucks are definitely not loaded on this train. Nor are any of the known tanks. Colonel Krescu said during the situation that a defector gave information about a new tank. Are there any drawings or sketches of it?"

Leo tapped his forehead thoughtfully:

"I had a similar aerial photo in my hands just a few days ago. We also

couldn't make any sense of the type of vehicles loaded, maybe I'll find them if we haven't already handed them in to the main photo office."

I turned to the sergeant again:

"Please make enlargements immediately, as large as the grain of the film allows. In the meantime, I will look for documents in the evaluation department."

Together with Dr. Barth, I went back to the evaluation. A Romanian captain was able to help us immediately. The registry contained a whole series of sketches and drawings of a new Soviet tank that had a drive similar to the Christie type. Interestingly, some of the sketches had descriptions in English. The documents must therefore have been provided to the Romanians by Americans or come from a British source. The turret of this tank was shifted forward, a significant difference to the previous developments.

"Do you think the covered vehicles could be tanks of this new type?" the captain asked me.

"I'm not sure yet. Maybe the enlargements will bring more."

Word of the discovery had spread like wildfire. When we returned to the picture station, a whole group of Romanian and German officers had gathered there to see for themselves. Colonel Krescu had also arrived and immediately turned to me:

"If your suspicions are confirmed, that would be quite extraordinary. Until now, we were only informed that this tank was being developed and tested. The fact that production has progressed so far that it is already being delivered to the troops is an extremely important discovery!" Leo S. had returned in the meantime and gave me the pictures he had mentioned:

"Take a look at the pictures, they were taken with a 75/30 imaging device and are therefore of a larger scale, although somewhat blurred due to the strong pixel migration."

I placed the pictures under the room glass. The load of a train was clearly visible. Here, too, this strange shadow formation. After barely half an hour, the still damp enlargements were on the table. A good job. It was now possible to see what had previously remained hidden: a gun barrel was sticking out from under the cover. So the tanks had not been loaded with their turrets upside down. There was no doubt that these were tanks of the new type. Colonel Krescu immediately turned to the officers around him:

"Have the necessary investigations carried out immediately. The command staff should be informed of this observation immediately. The documents must be sent out by courier today." With a brief nod of his head,

he took his leave:

"Thank you, we will have more to do with each other!"

Dr. Barth grabbed me by the arm:

"Our people also need to know this immediately, we're going back to the city."

I could hardly say goodbye to Leo S.. Would it be years before I saw this original Tyrolean again? It was a pity that this war had so confused us and scattered us to the four winds.

Mr. Sommer joined us for the return journey. As always, he was a jolly fellow. One had the impression that the whole world theater was more a source of ironic humor than sorrowful sadness. Who knows if he didn't have the right attitude to life? For me, however, the world was still full of mysteries.

"It seems to me that you're in a doomsday mood again," Mr. Sommer turned to me. Dr. Barth grinned.

"I'm sure you don't quite understand me, Mr. Sommer. I'm still very young compared to you and Dr. Barth. I may have traveled half of Europe with my comrades before the war, but you still have to think about the future and how things will develop. I dreamed of a completely different career goal and now see it disappearing into ever more unattainable distances. Where you, thanks to your experience, soon come to a conclusion, I am constantly faced with unsolvable problems. What I have heard and seen again today has stirred me up so much that I first have to bring order to my thoughts in order to grasp even a part of the insights you have mentioned. Here is just one example: for you and Dr. Barth it seems inevitable that there will be a war with the USSR. In view of the wealth of material we have seen today, I have to ask myself, does our leadership know the real strength of the enemy? Does the High Command of the Wehrmacht know that this new tank is already being delivered to the troops? Do they even know what a huge deployment is taking place over there? A political solution must still be possible here. Or is there really no way out?"

To be honest, I was genuinely shocked when I realized the scale of this war machine for the first time today, and that fact simply concerns me. I am convinced that the last two years have been a kind of war game compared to what is coming. Or do you disagree?"

"You are mistaken if you think we are as indifferent to all this as we seem to be," replied Dr. Barth, "we have already spoken on the journey

here and you know how I feel about it. The train has left. Perhaps Sommer can tell you something else from his point of view. Feel free to talk to Richard when you get the chance."

For the first time I no longer saw Mr. Sommer laughing; for a moment he remained in deep thought, then he began to speak:

"Twelve years ago, when I stepped out into life, I judged politics by the same standards that you apply today. That changed very quickly during my long stay abroad. Just a few very simple examples that are already relevant to you: Poland first. Great Britain had guaranteed the territorial integrity of Poland and Romania by treaty before the outbreak of war. If one were to follow your train of thought, the British would have had to declare war not only on the Reich but also on the USSR, because the consequence of the German-Soviet secret treaty of the end of August 39 on the fourth partition of Poland was the Soviet invasion of 17 September 39. So Churchill basically did nothing different from Hitler, only for different reasons. He had long since handed the Poles over to the Soviets.

The case of Romania is somewhat different. Here, Great Britain had guaranteed the inviolability of its borders against any aggressor, including the Soviet Union. So what was done to avoid being drawn into a conflict with the Soviet Union over the occupation of Bessarabia? They unilaterally terminated the guarantee treaty without further ado, believing themselves to be absolved of any responsibility. Romania was virtually forced into an alliance with the Reich if it did not want to hand itself over to the Soviets immediately and unconditionally. Don't laugh when I start using my formula 'colonial policy' again.

You are making a big mistake if you only look at developments from your own point of view. Our leadership knew that it was only granted a brief respite, because the Soviet advance did not begin in the fall of 1940, it began in the fall of 1939.

Only a few people know, for example, Stalin's declaration of entry into the war against Poland. While Molotov had still toasted the destruction of this "criminal" Polish state with Ribbentrop, Stalin's statement sounded quite different. He justified the invasion of eastern Poland by saying that the Ukrainians and Ruthenians should be saved from German occupation. This was not allowed to be published in our country. From this moment on, the pressure on the Reich government did not let up. This was followed by the originally unagreed demand for Lithuania to be incorporated into the Soviet sphere of interest. The German population did not even realize that Stalin was cleverly exploiting the German commitment in the French

campaign to push his sphere of influence westwards.

In November 1939, we witnessed the surprising termination of the Soviet-Finnish non-aggression treaty by the Soviet Union in order to launch an attack on Finland on November 30, 1939. Neither Great Britain, France nor the USA stood up as guarantor powers, on the contrary. If the Swedes had not helped with extensive supplies of material and taken over entire sections of the front with volunteer units, the end would have been foreseeable. Thanks to their unprecedented bravery, the Finns retained some of their freedom of choice. The assurance of the right of passage to the German Wehrmacht after the occupation of northern Norway brought the Finns some relief from Soviet pressure. Here, too, Stalin disregarded the German-Soviet agreements.

Why do you think your squadron was transferred to Romania in October 1940? The situation had become extremely dangerous for the Balkans and thus also for the German Reich as a result of the Soviet actions of June 1940. There were perhaps 8 German divisions in Poland and Slovakia at the time, but there were already 52 Soviet divisions on the western border of the USSR, and 18 divisions on the Romanian border alone. What really happened? On June 23, 1940, the Soviets informed the Reich government that they intended to occupy Bessarabia in the next few days. At the same time, the Soviets sent a harsh ultimatum to the Romanian government. A request by the Romanian government for the planned evacuation of Bessarabia was ultimately rejected. In view of this development, the imperial government had no choice but to recommend that Romania accept the ultimatum. What followed was actually an attack against the Reich. The Red Army not only occupied Bessarabia and the eastern part of Bukovina beyond the Pruth as far as the Dniestr, it also occupied the entire Buchenland, including the capital Chernivtsi, as far as the Slovakian border. Not only that, it also occupied an area that had never belonged to Poland or Russia at all. If you look at a good map, you will immediately know why! There are good transport routes from there to Carpatho-Ukraine and the Pannonian Basin, i.e. to Hungary. Do you remember the current situation? Then you will also know why the Red Army has assembled 10 divisions there, including an armored corps.

It is an almost unforgivable mistake that, despite our warning, the Reich government only turned its attention to the south-eastern area on a massive scale from this point onwards. This mistake had already been made during the First World War.

What the German public completely missed out on was the lifting of the

US arms embargo on the USSR in January of this year. However, this had already been preceded by an American-Soviet economic agreement in October 1940.

This was followed by Molotov's intervention with regard to Bulgaria. The Soviets had also prepared the occupation here and had still not given up their intention. The Reich government now had to negotiate under extreme pressure if the worst was to be avoided. You know the result: an alliance with Bulgaria and military occupation. The British had gained a foothold in Greece. The fact that the USA also intervened here was expressed by the dispatch of special envoy Donovan to Sofia. Apparently the USA and Great Britain wanted to save a bridgehead in the Balkans, what harmless ideas of Soviet policy! Another one of Churchill's colonial policy fantasies. It's really no laughing matter, it's deeply sad what's happening here. During the upheaval in Yugoslavia on March 27, the Yugoslav Prime Minister Stoyadinovich was arrested and handed over to the British by the insurgents. Against all reason and in violation of all rules of international law, the British accepted the extradition. As I always say: it is only a 'Negro chief'. We have known since yesterday that they were waiting for us after the porter. They took our luggage, stowed it on a trolley and off we went towards the reception hall.

The excitement caused by the recent events in Yugoslavia and Greece could also be felt at this station. Numerous Romanian soldiers of all ranks crowded the platforms. We pushed our way to one of the side exits where the carriage was waiting for us. The driver put our luggage in the luggage compartment and "off we went". The car was a French Citroen, very wide and comfortable, you could almost sink into the upholstery.

As if Dr. Barth had guessed my thoughts, he said to me:

"You can call your bride later, we have to sort out the official business first."

The driver, who looked like a German, but could just as easily have been Romanian, made his way along the road, disregarding all Central European traffic rules. Sem's speed was breathtaking. Sometimes overtaking on the left, sometimes on the right, his blaring horn was an indispensable prop. But as dangerous as it looked, you somehow felt safe. He was an excellent driver with amazing responsiveness.

Bucharest seemed to have changed in the few weeks I had been away. People's faces were more worried, the store windows emptier, the restlessness more hectic.

We drove out to a villa suburb. The driver stopped in front of the gate of

a villa surrounded by a high wall, jumped out and rang the bell. The heavy door opened almost silently. Dr. Barth showed his ID. I handed over my travel documents. The dark wood paneling in the hallway gave the room a gloomy feel. A middle-aged gentleman greeted the doctor in a very friendly, almost submissive manner, but with a noticeably reserved undertone:

"Dr. Barth, I'm delighted to see you here again. Your accommodation has already been arranged."

When he turned to me, his tone became downright haughty. I hated such vacuous types who could only present their superiority through a dismissive façade. At that time I could not have imagined how much my first impression would be confirmed a few years later when my wife, interned with many thousands of other Reich Germans, had to experience the lowly character of this man in all its shamelessness.

"We've put you up in the house of a trusted person, with a Romanian staff officer. The driver will take you there. You can contact your relatives, but you should not be seen much in the city. If you meet an acquaintance or comrade, you are on leave, for example. You will receive a special ID card and Romanian means of payment here in the office. You must always be available by telephone. Tomorrow morning at 07.30 you will be at the cab rank at Piața Romana. You will be picked up there. Do you understand?"

I bowed briefly and signed out.

"Don't celebrate too much. You need a clear head tomorrow!" Dr. Barth called after me.

The driver already seemed to know. As soon as I sat in the car, he sped off towards the city center at a murderous speed. He stopped in front of a small house near the racecourse. The driver got out and rang the bell. A dark-haired Romanian woman, dressed with French elegance, opened the door. The driver exchanged a few words with her in Romanian and introduced me. The lady seemed pleased with me. She called me into one of the adjoining rooms. A young, friendly soldier appeared and picked up my suitcase. On the upper floor, he showed me to my room. A nice big room with its own telephone and bathroom. Everything was there, nothing was missing. What particularly impressed me was that everything was spotlessly clean.

After a few minutes, the housewife came and asked me if I had already eaten lunch. I thanked her and assured her, not entirely truthfully, that I had already been invited to a friend's house, which visibly disappointed her. A quick shower. Barely half an hour later I was holding my bride in my arms.

She was so surprised that she could hardly get a word out.

"Where are you from?"

"I'll be back for a while!"

We were happy, unspeakably happy, how could it be otherwise.

As agreed, I reported in the next morning. Dr. Barth had already arrived and greeted me warmly. A dozen gentlemen in plain clothes crowded the hallway. I was briefly introduced.

A Mr. Wagner seemed to be in charge. There was also a Mr. Vachenauer, who by pronunciation was an Upper Bavarian, a friendly, likeable man. As always, I was one of the youngest, only two or three were in their mid-twenties, everyone else was older.

We left with four cars every few minutes. We headed out onto the highway towards Ploesti. After about 25 km, we turned off the main road and drove along a well-maintained side road to a remote complex of buildings that resembled a manor house and was situated on the edge of a small lake. There was a high barbed wire fence to keep out unwanted visitors. Soldiers or gendarmes with dogs were on patrol. Our credentials were checked very carefully at the guard post and then we were allowed to pass.

We were escorted to an adjoining building, at the entrance to which another thorough check was carried out. In the reception hall there were numerous civilians as well as Romanian and German officers from all branches of the armed forces. Where had we got to? I knew this area. The buildings were so isolated that I had never noticed them.

After a few minutes, we were asked to enter a large room. A German in civilian clothes checked our IDs again using a list on the counter and only then were we allowed to enter.

I looked around curiously. We were in a storage room. On the walls were maps of all scales and numerous aerial photographs. Behind the speaker's desk, a large-scale map covered the entire front of the room. A quick glance was enough: it was a map of Eastern Romania, Bessarabia, the Buchenland and parts of Galicia, east to the Bug, Nikolayev-Odessa, littered with countless blue and red tactical signs. A Romanian captain was still busy making markings, a sergeant was helping him.

I was still at a loss. From the astonished faces of my neighbors, I gathered that I was not alone here for the first time. There were too many questioning glances at each other. Only a few acted as if they were at home

here. From the door came a Romanian, then a German commando call:

"Gentlemen, I'm reporting!"

A Romanian general stood in the doorway, a pleasant figure, not tainted with the operetta-like perfume that some of his younger comrades displayed. He greeted those present, first in fluent German, then in Romanian, and asked them to take a seat. There must have been about 25 of us "civilians" and perhaps 15 officers in uniform. With a barely perceptible nod of his head, he greeted Dr. Barth, who also returned a barely perceptible greeting. So the two of them knew each other.

A Romanian aviation officer spoke a few introductory words, followed by a German special leader with the rank of captain:

"Gentlemen, everything that is spoken and shown here, all aerial photographs and maps, are 'Secret Command Material'. No recordings may be made. You may not speak to anyone about what you have seen and heard. Violations are treason and are punishable by death. General Munteniu will be in charge of the situation!"

The general stepped up to the lectern, bowed and began his remarks in Romanian, which the special guide translated perfectly.

"Gentlemen, the development of the situation in Yugoslavia and Greece is approaching a climax which does not yet have any immediate consequences for the Kingdom of Romania. However, it is inevitable that my country will have to abandon its policy of neutrality and internal stabilization in the face of these tensions. Romania is not threatened by the upheaval in Yugoslavia, but the Soviet declaration of guarantee for the new rulers has made Moscow's real direction of thrust clear. The USSR will not avoid confrontations with the Reich. This is a development that His Excellency, General Antonescu, has repeatedly warned not only the Reich government but also the governments of the USA and the United Kingdom about since July 1940. The abolition of the guarantees of our borders by the British Crown has put Romania in a hopeless situation and has inevitably led to a leaning towards the Reich.

On June 26, 1940, the day of the invasion of Bukovina and Bessarabia, the Red Army had already reached a strength that would have made a continuation of the attack against Romanian territory possible without further ado. Since then, these formations have been constantly reinforced and, in particular by the 12th Army in Bukovina, a situation has been created which represents a serious threat to Romania and indicates that the USSR is also considering taking Moldavia and the oil regions.

Section 3 of the Additional Protocol to the German-Soviet Treaty of

August 39, which has become available to us, has the following wording:

With regard to south-eastern Europe, the Soviet side emphasized its interest in Bessarabia. The German side declared its complete lack of interest in this area⁽¹⁾.

With the occupation of Buchenland, the USSR clearly overstepped the boundaries laid down in these additional protocols to the German-Soviet agreement. This was clearly done with the intention of creating a favorable starting position for the occupation of Romania and Hungary. At the end of October 40, a Soviet battalion crossed the Kilia south of Ismail. The Soviet Union obviously assumed that the German Reich would not be able to seriously prevent an intervention by the Red Army due to its ties on the western borders. The demands made by Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov during his visit to Berlin on 12 and 13 November 1940 must be seen as confirmation of the Romanian fears."

As always, when I was gripped by great excitement, I began to shiver. Breathless silence reigned in the room. The curtain, which had prevented me from seeing the stage of the Romanian play for so long, had been torn away with a jerk.

The general took a pointer and stepped up to the map hanging behind him.

"As of April 6, 1941, in the morning, the Red Army on the Romanian eastern and northern borders was organized as follows:

Southern front: Commander: General Tyulenew, right border Black Sea, left border a line from Mogilew-Podolsk to about Dorohoi.

Southwest Front: Commander: General Kisonos

Right border adjoining southern front, left border northern edge of Pripetsümpfe, approximately Pinsk.

The southern front is directly subordinate:

In the southern section from the Black Sea to a line from Balta to just north of Jasy, the 9th Army, commanded by General Cherevichenko.

At least 4 rifle divisions, armoured and mechanized units in the strength of two armoured divisions, presumably two motorized rifle divisions are recognized in the 9th Army. In the northern section, the 18th Army, commanded by General Smirnov with armoured and mechanized units in the strength of two armoured divisions, one cavalry division, at least 5 rifle and motorized rifle divisions. Plus strong engineer and artillery units.

The 12th Army, commanded by General Ponedelin, followed in the subsequent southern section of the Southwestern Front. The narrow combat strip of this army already shows the center of gravity in this area. There are 6 rifle divisions, 2 mountain divisions, 2 motorized rifle divisions and two divisions' worth of armoured and mechanized brigades.

The 12th Army is joined in the north by the 26th Army, commanded by General Kostenko, the 6th Army, commanded by General Muzychenko, and the 5th Army, commanded by General Potapov.

The supply of tanks and armored units in considerable strength to the sections of the 5th and 6th Armies also suggests the formation of a focal point there. However, this has no current significance for Romania.

Gentlemen, may I once again draw your attention to the extremely threatening situation that has arisen on our north-eastern border, particularly because the Soviets have considerable mobility and firepower at their disposal due to the concentration of strong tank units, motorized rifle units and armoured artillery.

Our government is also very worried at the moment because we have received reports that the navy is assembling landing units. With a simultaneous landing in Dobruja and an attack against Moldavia, Romania's situation is becoming hopeless. Colonel Krescu will now present you with the latest information on the enemy situation. Thank you."

The colonel, an elegant, tall man, had already caught my eye when I entered the room. I noticed that he also kept looking at me. Where had I seen this man before?

As a colonel, he was surprisingly young by Romanian standards. I estimated him to be just under 40. The respect with which he was treated by the Romanian officers present, especially the younger ones, was striking.

The colonel began his remarks in Romanian, but dispensed with an interpreter and translated into German himself, which he spoke as his mother tongue.

"Gentlemen, as already mentioned, there have been no significant new findings regarding the Red Army's troop organization in front of the Romanian border, apart from the reinforcement of the 12th Army.

Around March 28, 41, a general meeting of the Southern Front took place in Kishinev, at which all division generals and their chiefs were present. A similar meeting was also held on the Southwestern Front. It is

known that the development of the situation in Yugoslavia was discussed. In addition, as part of a planning exercise, the possibility of moving into Bulgaria using the ship bridges across the Danube created by German troops was considered in order to provide immediate support for the Yugoslav army should the Yugoslav putsch be successful. The report is reliable; it is confirmed by the report of a V-Person, according to which one of the participating generals toasted a reunion in Sofia in the company of his officers. The arrival of three German divisions in the Jasy-Suceava area seems to be the only headache for the leadership of the Southern Front.

At the end of March, a Soviet tank officer of Romanian nationality defected to NO Vaslui, near Drinceni, bringing with him extensive material on Soviet intentions. However, these documents still need to be examined in detail.

In the last few days, exercises using heavy and super-heavy tanks have been reported in the Bolgrad and Komrat area. Units with heavy bridging equipment were observed on the Tiraspol-Tarutino road, heading southwest.

This report is probably consistent with the observation of the construction of pontoon ferries in the northern part of the lagoon near Bolgrad.

A V-Person reported an exercise in regimental strength from the Sarata area on 30. 3. 41.

It is striking that extensive personnel changes are reported in the 9th Army, especially among younger staff officers. The observations are confirmed by telephone and radio reconnaissance. This may have camouflage reasons. I myself suspect that the formation of reserves east of the Dniestr is intentional.

The civilian population is frightened by numerous riots. The ruthless collection of food by the troops has led to shortages of meat and bread.

In the 18th Army, exercises in battalion strength can be observed in the area north of Kishinev, especially near Floresti. In contrast to the 9th Army section, entrenchment work was carried out here on the east bank of the Pruth. V-Persons report strong troop movements from the area east of Jasy, especially northeast of Ungheni-Kornesti. A motorized division is probably being brought in. General Smirnov seems to have an armored brigade in the rear.

Movements of officers were also reported here. Overall, however, the

situation is calmer. The troops are behaving in a more disciplined manner. Extensive food confiscations have led to serious supply problems for the population, especially in the capital Kishinev itself. There were also serious riots against the German and Romanian sections of the population who had stayed behind, in which Jewish groups were allegedly also involved.

Numerous exercises up to regimental strength have been carried out in the area of the 12th Army in recent weeks. Using pioneer units and forcibly recruited civilians, the Tarnopol-Chernivtsi, Khmel'nitsky-Kamenets-Polsk and Winitsa-Mogilev roads are currently being upgraded.

Heavy troop transports have been reported on the Winitsa-Smerinka-Chmel'nitsk-Tarnopol-Lemberg railroad line. The trains allegedly run at night at block intervals. The Tarnopol, Khmel'nitsk and Smerinka stations are very busy. On April 2, a strong tank formation marched on the Khmel'nitsk road towards Kamenets-Podolsk. At the end of March, a regimental exercise of mountain troops took place in the Kolomea area. Chernivtsi is the seat of a corps headquarters and is occupied by motorized troops. Northwest of Radauti, a platoon of reconnaissance troops crossed the Romanian border on March 20 and advanced about 1 km deep into Romanian territory. One armored division is presumably in the area northeast of Mogilev-Podolsk, another northeast of Kamenets-Podolsk. So far, three temporary bridges have been built across the Dniester in addition to the existing bridges.

Extensive forced quartering and requisitioning put more strain on the population in Buchenland than in Bessarabia. In Chernivtsi, there were progroms against ethnic Germans who refused to be resettled. The supply situation for the civilian population is extremely tense, as the troops are supplied from the countryside. All young men fit for military service were conscripted regardless of their ethnicity.

Let me summarize: In the entire Bessarabian area and in the Buchenland, an increasing reinforcement of the large formations can be seen. However, the main focus of the Soviet advance appears to be the Lviv-Kovel area. The development of the situation with the 12th Army must be regarded as a serious threat to Romanian territory.

I can take it for granted that the Soviet units are mainly equipped with automatic small arms - self-loading rifles, submachine guns and machine guns. They therefore have superior firepower to our Romanian divisions. A heavy tank gun is currently being introduced that is capable of penetrating up to 25 mm of steel. The standard guns in the rifle divisions are the 7.62

cm field gun and the 15.2 cm heavy field howitzer. The artillery regiments were differently equipped, e.g. older 10.7 cm and 12.2 cm howitzers and a more modern 8.5 cm gun. Some artillery divisions of the 12th Army were observed to have guns on self-propelled mounts and the Pak 4.5 cm.

The following tanks and armored vehicles can be found in the PzDivisions of the MechKorps, the PzRegiments of a MotSchtzDivision, the PzBattalions of the KavDivisions and SchtzDivisions:

- Light tank T 26, with armor between 6 and 15 mm, combat weight approx. 8 t, 4.5-cm-KWK;
- BT 5 light tank, armor 6-13 mm, combat weight 11.5 t, 4.5 cm KWK (in some cases also 7.62 cm KWK);
- BT 7 light tank, armor between 15 and 20 mm, combat weight 13.8 t, KWK 4.5 cm or 7.62 cm;
- Medium tank T 28, armor between 40 and 80 mm, combat weight 32 t, KWK 7.62 cm;
- Heavy tank T 35, armor between 20 and 30 mm, combat weight 50 t, KWK 7.62 cm and two KWK 4.5 cm;
- Light floating tanks T 37 and T 38, armament: machine guns;
- The T 40, T 50 and T 70 light tanks are being introduced, but we do not yet have any details;
- Heavy tank KW 1, armor between 20 and 90 mm, combat weight 43.5 t, KWK 4.5 cm and 7.62 cm.
- Assault tank KW 2, (like KW 1) only with KW howitzer 15.2 cm (52 t).

The defector mentioned at the beginning reported the introduction of a new tank with great speed and firepower. The drive, similar to the Christie development, is said to be equipped with a very wide track. There are reports of KWK 7.62 cm with 30 caliber lengths. The tank has not yet been observed in the occupied territories and is therefore still in the process of being introduced.

That concludes my topic. Are there any more questions, gentlemen?"

The colonel indicated a gesture of honor and took a seat next to the general. He stood up and asked a young lieutenant colonel from the Romanian air force to give his speech.

"Lieutenant Colonel Cristeanu will inform you about the air situation."

The lieutenant colonel made a somewhat boyish impression, which often leads to false conclusions. The first words showed that the officer had an excellent command of his subject, even though he gave his lecture exclusively in Romanian and used an interpreter.

He stepped up to one of the cards next to the large layer and began his explanations:

I carefully made my way along the walls of the house to the square. The gendarmes waved excitedly at me to take cover. I waved them off and walked out onto the square along a garden wall secured with wrought iron bars. The muzzle flashes of rifles flashed by the Foreign Ministry. Behind a low garden wall, some civilians lay in cover, their faces contorted in fear. A woman shook in a fit of crying. I tried to jump across the next street when a volley of machine-gun fire tore up the road in front of me. Asphalt and stones flew into my face. I quickly jumped for cover too. As I scanned the windows of the houses from which the fire was coming, one machine gun shell after another rattled over me. I could see a skylight carefully open on the roof of a villa opposite. I slowly pushed my way behind a bush and then across the lawn to a wall of a house that offered more cover. The muzzle of a machine gun became visible. I shouted over to the gendarmes and tried to warn them. The sergeant shrugged his shoulders helplessly; he didn't seem to see anything. I looked up at the skylight, spellbound. There was no danger to the civilians behind me, in the shadow of the garden wall, if they just stayed under cover. Then the machine gun fire rattled across the square. Fine, bluish smoke drifted over the roof. Sand splattered from the sacks of the barricade. The sergeant jumped up and fell to the ground with a slight twist. The machine gun mowed mercilessly over the gendarmes, who were without any cover from this angle. One of them tried to jump back. As he jumped, a volley caught him too; he collapsed with a shrill cry and rolled into the gutter. The machine gun behind the sandbags had fallen over. The plaster fell from the walls of the houses. Windows shattered. Again and again, bursts of fire swept over the houses occupied by the gendarmes. Wild screams tore me from my cover. A group of legionnaires stormed along the wall of the house. The excitement of battle marked their pale faces under their fur hats. Their shirts glowed green under their coats. Supported by the fire of the machine gun, they stormed the sandbag barricade. Some of the gendarmes tried to escape. They were ruthlessly crushed.

I jumped up and ran towards the boulevard, sheltered by a garden wall. Pungent smoke drifted over from the gendarmerie barracks. The downed gunners of an infantry gun lay behind some sandbags. The noise of the fighting was getting heavier and heavier. I had now realized that I had made a mistake by not returning to the unit. But it was too late.

I sprinted along the boulevard, always seeking cover behind trees. At the

junction of a small side street lay the bodies of more than 10 legionnaires who had obviously been shot without much ado. Their blood was pooling in the gutter. Their chalk-white faces stared distortedly at me, as if they wanted to call me as a witness. Their bodies were slumped over each other as they collapsed, as if one was trying to protect the other from the fatal bullet even in death.

In the area around the Piata Romana, the military and gendarmes seemed to be in complete control of the situation. Field guns and machine guns were positioned on the street corners; barbed wire obstacles blocked off the roadway. Civilians were thoroughly searched. I was left unscathed, but was warned to move on, as there was still heavy fighting around Boulevard Brateanu. The bodies of numerous gendarmes and soldiers lay in front of the business school. Blood-red snow bore witness to the irreconcilable nature of the battle. Frightened faces stared down at me from the windows of the surrounding houses. It was obviously a mystery to them how people could be so indifferent to these bloody events. But it wasn't indifference, it was simply helplessness. I was not standing next to the events, I was standing in the middle of them, deeply shaken. I was standing next to the fanatical legionnaires, the gendarmes who were used to giving orders, the frightened women, the indecisive citizens. This was nothing new for them, it had been a recurring experience for many years. It was an encounter with violence. For me it was a sudden awakening.

Images of the past formed in this awakening. It might have been 1931 or 1932. At lunchtime, I was walking home from school with a friend. Troops in field gray windbreakers with the insignia of the Red Front Fighters' League were marching everywhere. They sang communist battle songs. At the junction of a road, a wild brawl broke out between members of the Stahlhelm and the SA and the Reds. Blood flowed on both sides. We boys watched curiously, not realizing the seriousness of the situation. Together we tried to get through a gate to our street and ran alongside a column that was shouting the Internationale to the sound of shawms. We had already reached the arcades and thought we were safe when suddenly, from the side streets, shock troops in the dark green uniforms of the state police rushed forward against the column; at the same time, the police blocked off the marching route in platoons, their carbines on their hips. I got scared and tried to escape into the driveway of a brewery. Screams of pain and rage from the fighting men erupted around me. The policemen were beating me with their rubber truncheons, the communists retaliated with their paddles,

chains, pieces of cable and short iron bars. A policeman fell right next to me and three or four men beat him furiously. I tried to protect myself with my satchel. A blow over the head robbed me of my senses, sparks of all colors danced before my eyes. I woke up at home in my bed. My mother made me wet compresses. Mr. Urban, a master baker in our neighbourhood, had rescued me and taken me to my parents. We never forgot each other.

A day or two later there was a commotion at our front door. I heard my father talking to someone, then a short, wiry police officer stood in my room, Lieutenant Eberl. He brought me a big bag of sweets. My parents refused, saying there was no need to apologize, it could happen. But I was delighted and somehow felt terribly important. My father laughed himself to death when I was stylized as a victim of capitalist tyranny in communist leaflets.

It was not the encounter with violence that wrenched this experience from my memory, but rather - and this remained a mystery to me - this clash of fanaticism and violence between people of the same people, the same blood, the same language. It was the merciless hostility of the revolution that made the nature of violence clearer to me than two years of war could ever have done.

I was glad to have finally reached my girlfriend's apartment. We were happy to see each other again in good health, albeit full of fear.

The avenging angel had also flown through this street. The legionnaires carried out many Feme sentences, which failed in November 1940 due to Antonescu's resistance. In one of the neighboring gardens I saw the bodies of people who had been beaten to death or shot. Their blood drew gruesome and bizarre pictures in the snow.

After a small snack, I made my way to the accommodation. The fighting seemed to take on more and more the character of a real battle. Numerous gendarmes, officers and soldiers had sided with the legionnaires. In the Aurel Vlaicu, a strong band of legionnaires was marching, in which the olive green of the soldiers already outweighed the bright green of the legionnaires. On the way, I tried to meet some of my Romanian friends, but in vain. Some of their homes were empty, others had been ransacked by search parties. In front of the house where Mircea lived, three legionnaires lay with their skulls bashed in. I turned the bodies over. Mircea was not among them. How could peace ever come to this people?

Our train arrived at the Gara de Nord in Bucharest around midday. The oriental diversity and yet western-oriented character of this full-blooded city was nowhere more evident than in the noisy confusion of this station. As soon as the train stopped, an almost unsettling stream of people from all nations poured across the platform. The shouts of "Hamal" from the passengers drowned out even the shunting noises of the oil-fired locomotives. Dozens of porters clamored for the passengers' luggage. Whenever someone thought their suitcase had been stolen, it would reappear somewhere. Once you'd experienced this a few times, you got used to it and realized that these porters had something of a professional honour - no stranger could sneak in. Thefts were a rarity.

Richard L. had long since taken his leave and disappeared without a trace in the hustle and bustle. Dr. Barth waved to a driver who had arrived with a